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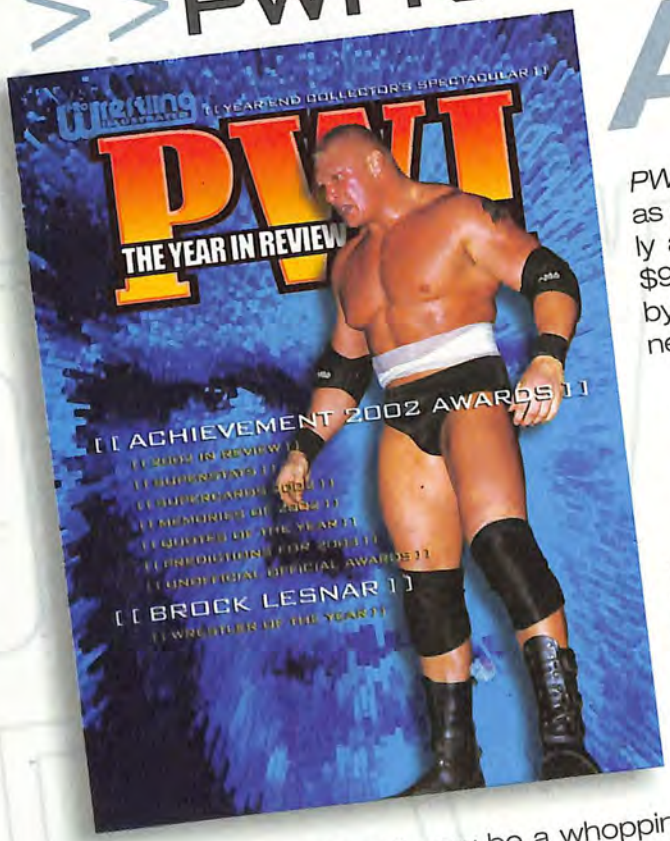

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from the desk of...

•In 1956, heavyweight boxing champion Rocky Marciano retired at age 32. The Rock was 49-0 when he relinquished the title and was still in his fighting prime. He spoke about back problems at the time, but the truth was he couldn't live with the fact that his manager, Al Weil, was taking 40 percent of his earnings. Speculation about a comeback was discussed for years, but it never happened.

•In 1965, Cleveland Browns fullback Jim Brown retired at age 29 after a dispute with team owner Art Modell. Seems Brown, an aspiring actor, would have been late for training camp because the filming of the movie *The Dirty Dozen* was running long. Modell said Brown would be fined if he came in late. Brown, a nine-time Pro Bowl selection and the NFL record-holder for average yards per rush at 5.22, did not take kindly to threats and quit.

•Just prior to the start of the Detroit Lions' 1999 training camp, running back Barry Sanders retired at age 31. Sanders, a Pro Bowler for each of his 10 years in the league, set an NFL record with 14 consecutive games rushing for 100 yards or more. Although he had $20.9-million and four years left on his contract and a lot of great football left in him, Sanders was frustrated over the direction the team was taking and walked away. Talk of a comeback persist to this day.

•Then there's a man named Michael Jordan. After leading the Chicago Bulls to their "three-peat," a third consecutive NBA title, Jordan retired in 1993 at age 30 for the first time to take a shot at a second career, as a baseball player. He signed a contract with the Chicago White Sox and was assigned to their minor league affiliate in Birmingham, Alabama. The greatest basketball player in the world was just a so-so minor-leaguer. He was back in the NBA in 1995 and helped the Bulls win three more rings.

•

It's very hard to put the sudden retirement of Brock Lesnar into historical perspective. While these four all-time greats quit with plenty left in the tank and loads of money still to be deposited in the bank, none was a 26-year-old whose star was still on the rise.

Lesnar's situation is unique. He didn't like his job. And in spite of the money, glory, and fame, he was not prepared to devote a lifetime to it. When he became a professional wrestler three years ago, he really didn't know what he was getting into. Wrestling collegiately in no way prepares one for life on the professional level. The constant pain, the rigorous travel, the time spent away from loved ones. The truth is, Lesnar never had a heart for this profession.

The question for Brock is this: What next? He says he'd like to play in the NFL. When Jordan said he wanted to try his hand at baseball, even the man whom many consider the greatest athlete ever was realistic about it. He didn't mind playing in the minor leagues, traveling in buses with a bunch of kids whose lifetime earnings—combined—would probably never equal what MJ made in one NBA season. Lesnar wants to march straight into the NFL. And he already has his team picked out, the hometown Minnesota Vikings. But there's a small problem. Vikings coach Mike Tice isn't the least bit interested.

With speed, strength, and youth on his side, it wouldn't be surprising if some team allowed him to come to training camp this summer. He might even get a "dark match" in an exhibition game, but he will not make anyone's 45-man roster. I think Lesnar knows that. What he needs is a chance to clear his head, allow himself some time to understand the opportunity he is dismissing. Once that happens, he'll be back.

That's one thing he does have in common with Jordan.

Stu Saks
Publisher

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July 2004

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before the bell

Compiled by Will Welsh

Hall of Shame

The night before WrestleMania XX, WWE inducted 10 superstars (Jesse Ventura, Don Muraco, Tito Santana, "Superstar" Billy Graham, Big John Studd, Sgt. Slaughter, Greg Valentine, Bobby Heenan, Harley Race, and The Junkyard Dog) and one wrestling celebrity (Pete Rose) into its Hall of Fame. Depending on to whom you talk, the honor is either one that should be cherished or one that should be dismissed as nothing more than a public relations ploy. Either way, new inductions figure to continue for the foreseeable future, which is why we're here. Below are some wrestlers who should never ever make the cut. We mean *never.*

Aldo Montoya. Before Justin Credible was Justin Credible, he was, well, a bunch of things. One of them was Aldo Montoya, the yellow-clad "Portuguese Man O' War." Oh, yeah, he also wore something that looked like a jockstrap on his head. *Nice!*

Beaver Cleavage. Although people may not be demanding their imminent return, The Headbangers were once the most popular WWF tag team around. When they went their separate ways, Headbanger Mosh needed a new gimmick. Hence, Beaver Cleavage, a twisted takeoff on the classic Beaver Cleaver character from the 1950s sitcom *Leave It To Beaver.* In the wrestling version, which debuted during the height of the risque "Attitude" era, Beaver was just a little *too* interested in his mom, who was portrayed by the lovely Marianna Komlos. If you missed it, trust us, you don't want to know much more.

Cloudy. At King of the Ring 1996, The Bodydonnas, Skip and Zip, introduced their new manager, who was coming in to replace their departed manager, the ever-popular Tammy "Sunny" Sytch. His name? Cloudy. Or was it *her* name?

The Goon. If you've ever seen the timeless hockey comedy *Slap Shot,* then you know what this gimmick was all about. If you didn't see the movie, don't worry about it. Just rest assured that a wrestler with ring attire designed to make him look like a hockey player was a bad idea. Yeah, a wrestler who drops his gloves and fights when he gets mad—real exciting!

Katie Vick. A horrible storyline gimmick whose legend might never die—even though she was already dead by the time we started hearing about her.

Mantaur. A wrestler who was half-man, half-bull and who wore a hollowed out buffalo's head to the ring. And he didn't stand half a chance of lasting very long. It might have worked on a show like *Xena: Warrior Princess,* but we even doubt that.

Max Moon. Remember when your mom forced you to wear "moon boots" before allowing you to go play in the snow? Now imagine an entire wrestling outfit designed with the moon boot look in mind. Can you say ugly? Konnan sure could; he left WWE shortly after being given the gimmick.

Xanta Claus. An evil Santa Claus who made his home in the South Pole. Enough said.

Mantaur vs. Bam Bam Bigelow

Talkin' Trash

Here's a list of the top 10 wrestling-related things you've been talking about lately, and our gut reaction to each.

10. Sting is working on a movie about his life. We wonder if this is where he'll admit, "Yeah, I ripped my character off of The Crow. So what!"

9. Kurt Angle is named the general manager of Smackdown. His best new perk: Dawn Marie.

8. Edge returns to WWE. The hard truth: If he doesn't start main-eventing within the next six to eight months, he probably never will.

7. Jesse Ventura hints at running for President of the United States during WrestleMania XX weekend. Please, please don't let this happen, because he might actually be crazy enough to win.

6. The Insane Clown Posse leaves NWA-TNA. And all because that group has so much other stuff going on *(cough, cough).*

5. The Undertaker returns. We're still not sure what we think of 'Taker's new look. There's a hint of old school 'Taker in there for sure, but he's also looking a little too ready to attend the Country Music Awards.

4. Trish Stratus picks Christian over Chris Jericho. We always knew good girl Stratus had a dark side. Remember, this is the same diva who once managed the unholy combination of A-Train (when he was known as Albert) and Test.

3. Brock Lesnar and Bill Goldberg get their butts heckled on their way out of WWE. You have to hand it to New York crowds—they'll make an example out of anyone.

2. Chris Benoit defeats Triple-H and Shawn Michaels at WrestleMania XX to win the Raw championship. About damn time.

1. The WWE post-WrestleMania draft lottery. The Dudley Boyz plus Booker T equal Triple-H, huh? It would probably be wise of Mr. Helmsley to avoid meeting Booker, Buh Buh Ray, and D-Von in a dark alley for the foreseeable future.

The Internet Insider

The following news items were culled from various wrestling-related Web sites—or were they? See if you can pick out the items that were actually reported on the Internet (which doesn't necessarily mean that they are true) and the ones we blatantly made up. The answers appear at the end of this column on page 11.

1. Jeff Jarrett needed a police escort leaving the building after beating Latin Lover in the main event at a big AAA show in Mexico City in March. The sellout crowd of approximately 18,000 was furious after Jarrett got the win with help from fellow NWA-TNA wrestler Abyss. Fans began throwing debris at the ring, and Jarrett and Abyss were both rushed from the building into a car that was waiting for them.

2. First, Brock Lesnar announced that he was leaving WWE for a shot at the NFL, and now Hulk Hogan's name is being associated with the league—but for a different reason. Hogan tried to help the Tampa Bay Buccaneers sign free agent tackle Orlando "Zeus" Brown, who is apparently a big wrestling fan. Knowing this, the Buccaneers sent Hogan, who lives in Tampa, Florida, and is a big Bucs fan, to meet Brown when he landed at Tampa International Airport. Despite Hogan's efforts, Brown ultimately decided to re-sign with the Baltimore Ravens.

3. With The Amazing Red back in action, NWA-TNA is aggressively pursuing a marketing deal with Crayola Crayons. TNA is hoping that Crayola executives will use Red as a spokesman for Crayola commercials that would air during TNA's syndicated show, *Xplosion,* but Crayola might be asking for too much to make the partnership work. According to numerous inside sources close to the talks, Crayola wants TNA to create at least two more wrestlers that would help with the marketing. Among the suggestions are The Bombastic Blue and The Outrageous Orange.

4. The Big Show has been cast as Fezzik—a role that endeared Andre the Giant to non-wrestling fans everywhere—for the upcoming *Princess Bride II.* Show was cast for the role after the movie's producers discussed possibilities with Vince McMahon. "I don't like it," said one WWE wrestler. "First, Show stole his original gimmick from Andre, and now he's taking his old movie part! Doesn't he understand when to say no?"

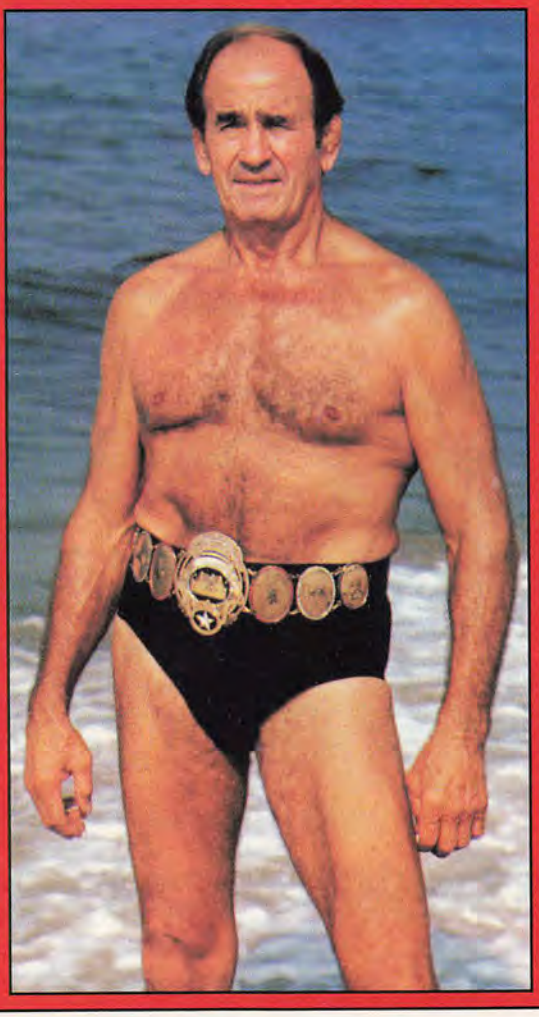
This Month in Wrestling History

July

July 20, 1878: George Hackenschmidt, later nicknamed "The Russian Lion," is born in Dorpat, Russia; his mother is Swedish, his father is German. (Good thing he wasn't born in his mother's native country. "The Swedish Lion" just isn't that intimidating, is it?)

July 5, 1916: Joe Stecher and Ed "Strangler" Lewis wrestle to a legendary five-hour draw in Omaha, Nebraska. Lewis is soundly booted by the crowd for wrestling defensively and making no attempts to go on the offense against the champion. Some fans at points shower the ring with seat cushions to show their displeasure. (To get an idea of what a five-hour draw would look like, take the first 4:30 of the Brock Lesnar vs. Bill Goldberg match at WrestleMania XX and multiply that boredom by 66. Utter misery.)

July 8, 1937: Lou Thesz (pictured) claims the National Wrestling Association title because, he says, Everett Marshall will not meet him in Kansas City in mid-July. (Using this as his precedent, *PWI* Senior Writer Dan Murphy began calling himself the undisputed world champion shortly after WrestleMania XX because the Raw, Smackdown, NWA, IWGP, Triple Crown, and GHC champions wouldn't meet him for a round-robin tournament in Buffalo, New York, in late-March.)



July 1979: The first edition of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated,* cover-dated September 1979, hits the newsstands. (Funny we should mention this, as our special 25th anniversary issue—cover-dated November 2004—goes on sale September 14. Just thought you'd want to know. Now go and mark that date on your calendar!)

July 16, 1991: Appearing on *The Arsenio Hall Show,* WWF World champion Hulk Hogan sternly declares, "I've trained 20 years, two hours a day, to look like I do. But the thing I am not is I'm not a steroid abuser, and I do not use steroids." Hogan would contradict those statements at Vince McMahon's 1994 trial. (Any of you Major League Baseball players out there paying attention?)

We Heard That!

"I thought [WrestleMania XX] was fantastic. There wasn't a bad match of the bunch, except for the Brock-Goldberg contest, but since, from what I understand, neither guy works for us anymore, let's just leave it at that."

—Lance Storm, who has yet to appear on a WrestleMania himself, giving honest commentary on the Brock Lesnar vs. Bill Goldberg contest from WrestleMania XX, www.stormwrestling.com

"The fact of the matter is, [my run with the WCW championship] really upset a lot of people and I'm sorry for that. I don't write the storylines. If it's sports entertainment and entertainment is what it's all about, then what's the big deal? I got so much s___. It was ridiculous, hearing on the radio these morons tearing me apart."

—Former WCW World champion David Arquette, in an interview with www.moviepoopshoot.com

"I don't think anyone ever really [retires] ... I mean, when people say, 'I'm retired,' in wrestling it's just like ... I don't think you ever really retire from this. I could have worked at WrestleMania after not working for eight months and probably worked as well as half the guys out there. So I don't think you ever really retire."

—Kevin Nash, endearing himself to wrestlers everywhere, in an interview with www.ign.com

"It was so much fun sitting back and talking to the guys who were going in the Hall. I never had anything planned to say. For weeks, I thought about what I was going to say. All of a sudden, everybody was talking about operations and sicknesses. So I went out there and just wanted to have fun and get things moving. And I had the skit with Gene [Okerlund] at WrestleMania. It was fun to do something like that again. It was a great weekend."

—Bobby Heenan, talking about being inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame, in an interview with www.wrestlingobserver.com

"I looked like a Samoan Michelin Man."

—The Rock, discussing what he looked like during his days as a 280-pound defensive tackle for the University of Miami Hurricanes football team, in an interview with *Men's Health*

caption me!

Think you're a better writer than the editors at *PWI?* Here's your chance to prove it, punk! And this time we are offering a very special prize—a copy of *The Rundown,* starring The Rock, on DVD!—for the five best captions written for this photo of Billy Gunn smelling something a little, um, funny. Just keep 'em short, and the funnier the better. If you think you're up to the task, e-mail your zany quips to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com, or slap a stamp on an envelope and snail-mail it to "Caption Me!" Box 1148, Fort Washington, PA 19034. The five best will be printed and will get a Rundown DVD. But to be eligible to win a prize, you must send us your complete street address with your entry. Three issues from now, we'll share with you the best of the bunch.

April's Best

"Geez, I hope when I become the champ someday, my hair doesn't look like that."
—Will Brown, Tumwater, WA

"Hey, man, I almost thought you were a girl!"
—Leonard Cadet, jqsmooth2001@yahoo.com

"Now we're gonna take lil' Rocky to school! Whoooooo!"
—betajoe@mail.eriecoast.com

"Dwayne, do me a favor. While they're taking this picture, do the hustle!"
—Michael Donato, Bohemia, NY

"Hey, Mr. Flair, pull my finger if you wanna smell what I'm cookin'!"
—Glenn Young, glenn804@sc.rr.com

Answers to Internet Insider:

Items 3 & 4 are totally made up.

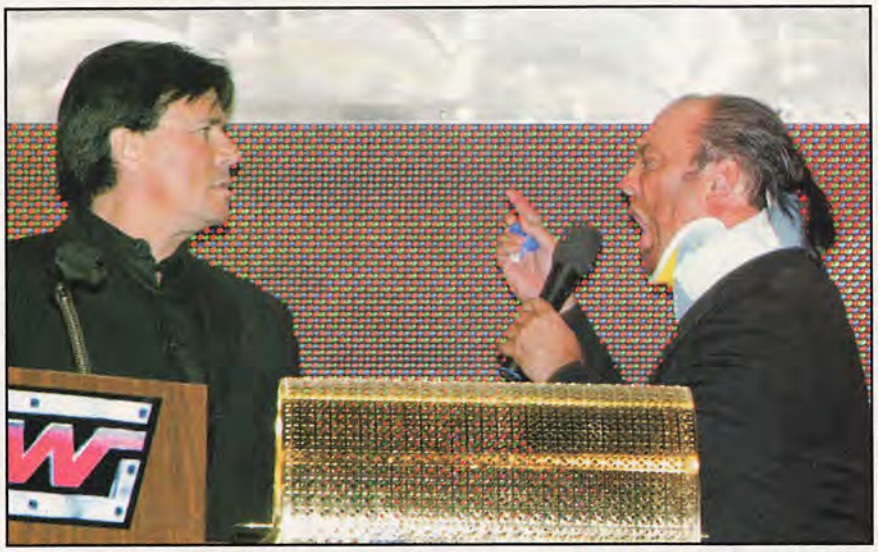
ringside

With Will Welsh

EIGHT DAYS AFTER WrestleMania XX, which was advertised as the WrestleMania "where it all begins again," WWE held its first-ever draft lottery. Smackdown General Manager **Paul Heyman** drew the names of **Rene Dupree**, **Mark Jindrak**, **Triple-H**, **Rob Van Dam**, **Theodore Long**, and **Spike Dudley** from Raw. Raw General Manager **Eric Bischoff** selected **Shelton Benjamin**, **Nidia**, **Rhyno**, **Tajiri**, **Edge**, and, with the last pick of the evening, Heyman (who immediately quit rather than work for his long-time rival), from Smackdown. Then, after a day's worth of trading, Triple-H had been sent back to Raw for **The Dudley Boyz** and **Booker T**, while Smackdown's **A-Train** and **Chuck Palumbo** had been exchanged for Raw's **Jackie Gayda** and **Rico**.

And to top everything off, **Kurt Angle** announced he had been named Smackdown's new general manager.

The roster manipulations, combined with the departures of **Brock Lesnar**, **Bill Goldberg**, and (for the time being) Kurt Angle from the active roster, should open up some top tier positions for some of the wrestlers who moved to Smackdown. Booker T and Rob Van Dam, even though they're not exactly young studs like Dupree and Jindrak, should be thrown into Smackdown's main event mix immediately. The Dudley Boyz, who had grown a bit stale during the end of their Raw run, should benefit from fresh feuds with **Rikishi** and **Scotty Too Hotty**, **The Basham Brothers**, and other Smackdown combinations. Even Dupree and Jindrak, who would have had a hard time breaking through on Raw because fellow up-and-comers such as **Randy Orton** and **Batista** already held higher-profile positions, should benefit from the draft lottery.



The first WWE draft lottery sure shook things up among the two brands. Maybe not as much as some expected, but Eric Bischoff and Paul Heyman both made some interesting selections. Heyman shook things up even further by quitting after Bischoff selected his name for Raw.

Of the newly acquired Raw wrestlers, Benjamin seems to be the wrestler most likely to capitalize on his new position. Now free to wrestle on his own, the former Smackdown tag team champion is expected to rise rapidly up WWE's singles ladder. And he got off to a great start when he pinned Triple-H in his first televised match with Raw in what was a fantastic bout. WWE executives have been hailing his skills for quite some time; now it's time to see whether he can live up to the reputation that's been built for him.

Edge, of all the wrestlers who switched brands, could have the hardest time adjusting. He's a year removed from his last in-ring activity, and he's joining a roster that has Triple-H, **Chris Benoit**, and **Shawn Michaels** entrenched at the very top. He's also back on the same roster as **Christian**, which could prove detrimental if WWE decides to reunite the two men. (What an extraordinarily huge step backward that would be.)

Angle's new role as Smackdown GM comes on the heels of yet another injury scare. The day after WrestleMania, he told **Vince McMahon** that he was again experiencing tingling in his extremities. After testing, it was determined that his surgically repaired neck only needed rest, but it's become clear that the 1996 Olympic gold medalist can no longer compete on a frequent basis. He will still wrestle part-time, but he's not going to be the dependable main-eventer WWE had hoped he'd still be—especially in light of Lesnar's unexpected departure.

Fan reaction to the draft lottery was strong, driving *Raw's* rating to its highest point (4.5) in nearly two years. Whether WWE maintains that momentum remains to be seen, but McMahon and company have to take the ratings increase as good news: A bigger audience is out there just waiting to be drawn in.

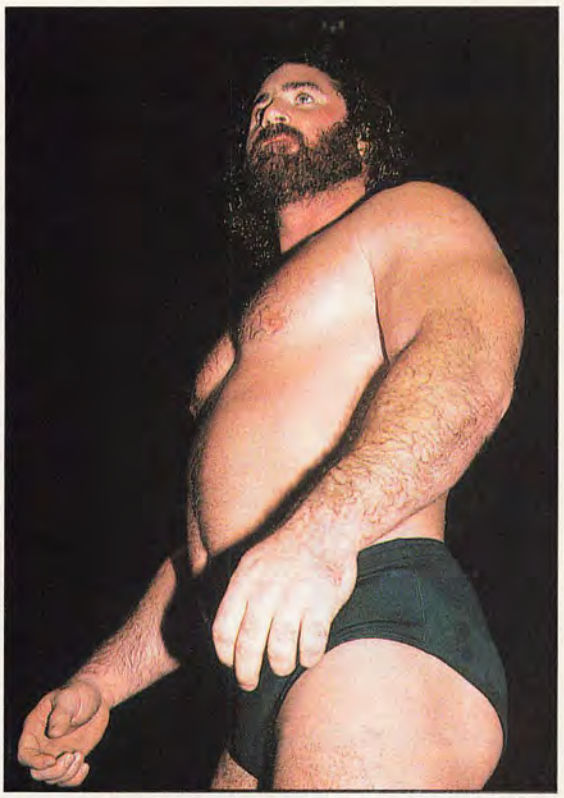
NWA-TNA's second America's X

Cup, this one featuring **Team Canada** taking on **Team Mexico** (the winners of the first America's X Cup over Team U.S.A.), aired on March 10, and it delivered some of the best wrestling in the promotion's history. Team Canada captain **Teddy Hart** and Team Mexico captain **Juventud Guerrera** both won their singles matches, and the score between the two teams remained tied after two more rounds of matches. The Cup came down to an eight-man elimination match featuring Hart, **Petey Williams**, **Johnny Devine**, and **Jack Evans** (Team Canada) taking on Guerrera, **Mr. Aguila**, **Abismo Negro**, and **Hector Garza** (Team Mexico). Garza won the match for his team when he last eliminated Devine, keeping the Cup in the hands of Team Mexico.

Unfortunately for TNA, many of the wrestlers used in the America's Cup don't have regular positions with the promotion. They're brought in only occasionally (which is understandable considering the finances involved) and their sporadic appearances do nothing for weekly continuity. There has to be some kind of middle ground. Let's hope TNA will be able to find it.

Hercules Hernandez, whose heyday in the sport came during the WWF's boom period of the 1980s, was found dead on March 6. As of press time, autopsy results had not been made public, but a heart attack was suspected as the cause.

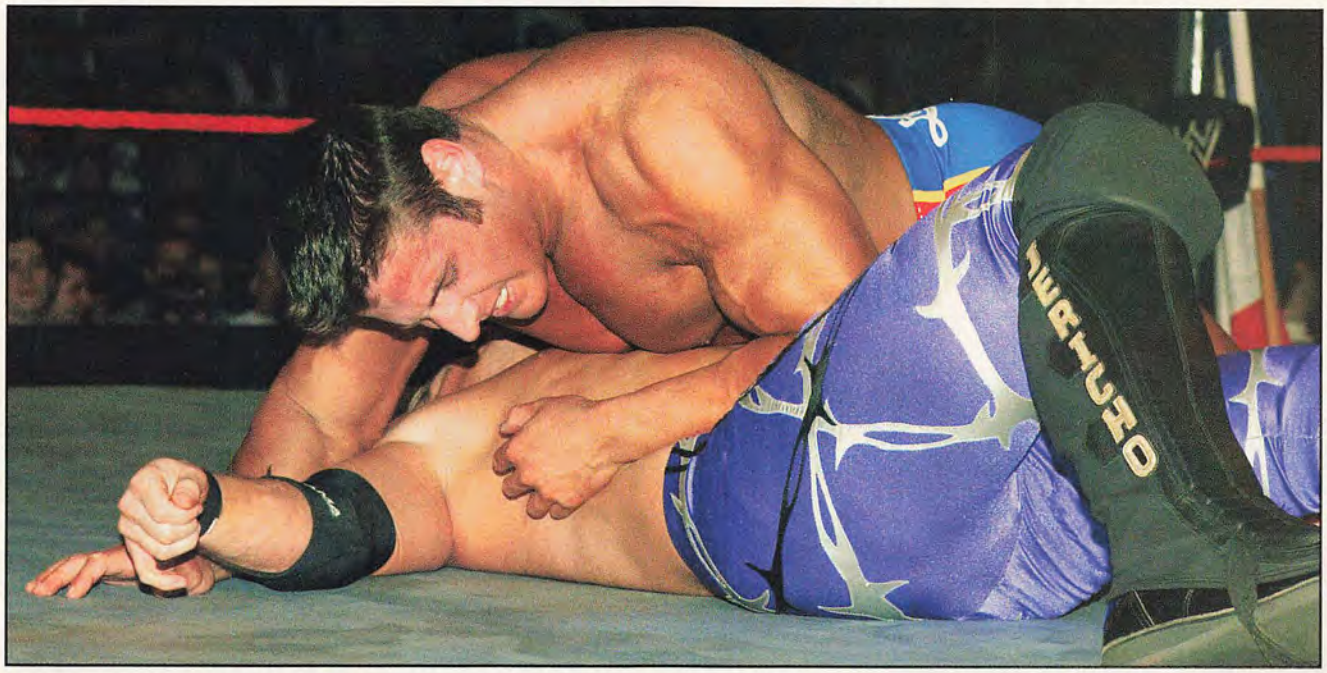
Hercules wrestled some of the top names of his era, including **Hulk Hogan**, **The Ultimate Warrior**, and **Randy Savage**, but he never won any titles during his run with the WWF and lost nearly all of his pay-per-view matches. His sole singles win at a WrestleMania came when he defeated **King Haku** at WrestleMania V in the pay-per-view's opening match. The biggest win of his career came in 1994, when he partnered with **Scott Norton** to defeat **Kensuke Sasaki** and **Road Warrior Hawk** to capture the IWGP International tag team title in Japan.



Hercules Hernandez was an important player for the WWF during its boom period of the mid- to late-1990s, although he never did win any *huge* matches. Hernandez died of a suspected heart attack at age 47 in March.

Hernandez, whose real name was **Raymond Constantine Fernandez**, was 47. He leaves behind his wife, **Debbie**, five daughters, and one son.

The USO of Metropolitan Washington recently honored WWE for its military support efforts—both state-



Smackdown was in dire need of some hot new talent when the draft was held. Although he didn't fare well against Chris Jericho in his final Raw match, Rene Dupree is already making an impact with Smackdown. His feud with John Cena looks intriguing.

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TAT AND NAY

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side and abroad—by awarding the promotion its Legacy of Hope Award. WWE wrestlers, both past and present, regularly visit military installations, and WWE has also been heavily involved in the Operation USO Care Package program. And who can forget WWE's Christmas in Iraq episode of *Smackdown*. **Linda McMahon**, Triple-H, **Mick Foley**, and Batista were on hand to receive the award, but congrats go out to all WWE wrestlers and employees who support the troops in this time of heightened military awareness.

WWE recently released Ohio Valley Wrestling's **Nikita**, who had been on a developmental contract. She got over pretty well in OVW, even briefly feuding with **Jim Cornette** earlier this year ... WWE also released **Faarooq** from his WWE contract following WrestleMania ... Rumors persist that WWE is looking to revive ECW, but that's hard to believe when the brand extension is still getting tweaked every now and again. The addition of a third brand would make things even more chaotic. But then again, what Vince McMahon wants, Vince McMahon gets ... **Christopher Nowinski** of *Tough Enough* fame remains on WWE's payroll, but he's *still* suffering from the effects of post-concussion syndrome. There's currently no timetable for his return.

That does it for me this month, fans. Enjoy your wanderings. □

There had been a lot of rumors in recent months about Nikita being on the verge of a callup from OVW to WWE. Alas, they were only rumors. She was released from her developmental contract this winter.

F.I.G.H.T.

The Warriors

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in focus

By Dave Lenker

"GAME'S" TIME AGAIN

Images of Taka Michinoku were dancing in front of my mind's eye as I intently watched the main event of the March 29 *Raw* from Cincinnati, a main event that might or might not go down as the night Shelton Benjamin the solo star was born.

Taka hasn't been spotted in a WWE ring in years, and to the best of my knowledge, there is no connection whatsoever between him and Benjamin, other than the fact that both have worked for WWE. For those who don't remember, Mr. Michinoku was signed amid great fanfare seven years ago to be the centerpiece of a revived light heavyweight division. He won the light heavyweight belt in December 1997 and reigned until October 1998, but by the time that reign had ended, said division had become an afterthought again. He was moved into a comedy tag team with Funaki for a while, but is now back in his native Japan. Taka Michinoku is hardly a key figure in WWE history.

But he was an important opponent for Triple-H four years ago. Taka was personally chosen by Vince McMahon to challenge "The Game" for his WWF World title on *Raw* on April 10, 2000, because Vince really liked Hunter back then, and Taka was a 169-pound cruiserweight, maybe the least likely WWF superstar at the time to ever hold the WWF World title. It was supposed to be the next best thing to a night off for Helmsley.

But for a couple of the six minutes that the match lasted, even though we knew it couldn't, wouldn't, and probably shouldn't happen, we thought just maybe Taka was going to win. He came surprisingly close. It was exciting while it lasted. Most importantly, Taka and Hunter both came out of it as more interesting wrestlers than they were when the night started.

Now put this together with a match Triple-H had with Rikishi three months earlier—one in which thousands of fans in the arena and millions more watching *Smackdown* at home—were convinced a new champion was about to be crowned. Rikishi settled for a win via disqualification, but he came out of that match looking like a real impact player in the WWF.

Basically, Triple-H, looking a lot like his idol, Ric Flair, in his prime, made himself into the perfect heel champion in early-2000. He was a cut above most of the rest—more than one cut above many—but he was just vulnerable enough that he could have gotten knocked off by just about anyone under the right circumstances.

The Triple-H we saw return from a torn quadriceps muscle in January

While watching the recent (career-making?) Triple-H vs. Shelton Benjamin match on Raw, Dave Lenker kept flashing back to a 2000 match in which HHH battled Taka Michinoku. It was a fond memory.

2002 had gained a lot of muscle mass, but he lost that vulnerability. He got his belt back two months later, then had a new world championship created for and handed to him in September 2002. For more than a year after that, he didn't give us the impression he could lose to anyone, really. His match quality suffered; his reputation took a huge hit.

In 2000, he was hated for all the right reasons. Because he was arrogant. Because he had the boss' spoiled daughter at his side. Because he cheated. And because he was exposed as a coward more times than he cared to admit.

By 2003, he was hated for all the wrong reasons. Because he pushed himself too hard. Because he got far too much face time and promo time week after week after week. Because he played the political games those with no backstage stroke whatsoever hate so much. Because he was married to the boss' daughter (for real). And because he made his opponents (Booker T, Rob Van Dam, Kane, Bill Goldberg) look weak, inept, and inferior and killed their momentum.

These last few months, however, have been encouraging. An already strong Shawn Michaels has looked stronger as a result of a feud with Triple-H. Chris Benoit finally reached the top tier in WWE by beating Triple-H in the center of the ring at WrestleMania. There could be no good excuses offered for that loss. And now Benjamin goes from solid tag team specialist to breakout star in the span of 20 minutes on a cool spring Monday night.

Most of the excess muscle is gone. The match quality is back close to where it was in 2000. And the rest of the Raw roster is looking stronger every week because "The Game" is making people look good.

How does Triple-H, Comeback Wrestler of the Year for 2004, sound?

QUICK HITTERS

•I'm surprised, but I like what I see from Nidia in the Raw women's division so far. It'll help her a lot to get some experience against the divas with more experience (read: every other wrestler in the women's division), but she hasn't looked out of place yet and keeps up fairly well.

•Had to laugh at the reactions of Paul Heyman and Eric Bischoff at the draft lottery. From sheer ecstasy when they were selecting names from the other brand to utter disgust whenever one of their guys got selected, no matter who it was, then back to ecstasy, then back to disgust. It was as if they didn't know going in that they were both going to gain and lose six people.

•After reading some quotes from NWA-TNA Director of Authority Vince Russo in a piece in the *Miami Herald,* I'm convinced that he is serious about cleaning up his approach to wrestling and becoming more of a family man. (If this were all a swerve, he wouldn't have held out this long before revealing it as such.) But then I think about this quote, about his son, who will enter his senior year of high school next year: "Once he graduates, I think I am going to move out of Atlanta ... I think that might be a good time for me to step away." How many times has he announced his plans for stepping away from wrestling now? And he never does.

•Really, it's time for Shawn Michaels to update his look already. The stripper garb just doesn't work anymore.

•How complicated is Eric Bischoff's job as Raw GM if he has Coach roaming around as his unofficial henchman and now Johnny [insert last name of the week here] as his apprentice?

•The John Bradshaw Layfield *character* is slowly growing on me. But considering WWE's failed attempts to push him as a singles star a couple of years ago—and the subsequent decision to reunite him with Faarooq—I'm not excited about seeing him wrestle longer one-on-one matches at the main event level. Have I overlooked his dramatic improvement in the ring since then? Maybe I just don't fully appreciate a good clothesline from hell.

•I can't really figure out why TNA keeps bringing Sting back. Did anyone order the March 31 PPV to see him serve as an enforcer referee?

•Did Stephanie McMahon really remain off WWE TV for five months (and still counting!) following her loss to her father in an "I Quit" match at No Mercy in October? I couldn't actually be starting to miss her—in small doses, *small ... doses*—could I?

(Have a comment or question about "In Focus" or anything else you see in ***PWI?*** *You can contact Dave Lenker via e-mail at dave_lenker@yahoo.com.)* □

Shawn Michaels' "Sexy Boy" music and stripper garb worked well for him a decade ago. A lot about his life has changed in the last decade. Might be time for the clothes and music to follow suit.

off the top rope

By Brandi Mankiewicz

If you wish to contribute to Brandi's mailbag, send your letters to:
TOP ROPE Box 1148 Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or send e-mail to: **offthetoprope@yahoo.com**

(Editor's note: The opinions expressed in this column are those of the letter writers and Brandi Mankiewicz herself. They do not necessarily reflect the editorial views of this magazine.)

NOW THAT MY little contest is over, I have one regret. I wish I had more than one dictionary and thesaurus to hand out. Man, you fans really have no clue how to compose a decent letter—or spell! Is the American educational system that inadequate, or do you all just not pay attention? I was raised on public schooling in what could be considered a somewhat poor rural area, and I am a brilliant writer, so the schools aren't to blame. I blame you for not taking the time to present yourselves in a more eloquent manner. Your letters are atrocious.

What bothers me most is that not every badly written letter comes from a child. The adults seem to be just as bad as the kids. Some of the letters I've received from adults look like they were written by toddlers. It's embarrassing to think that we all have the same basic DNA structure.

Have you no pride? A little self-respect goes a long way. You really should try it some time. Until you all get a backbone and some dignity, I'll remain the champion of this cause. Why? Because it's the honorable thing to do.

What's up Brandi!

I think that WWE should take the women's division more seriously. Granted, there are a lot of WWE fans out there that consider the female wrestlers pure eye candy. While I'll even admit that a lot of them are beautiful, they are just trying to get people to respect them as wrestlers. Take Trish Stratus, for instance. When she debuted for WWE, she did a lot of catfighting, but she is now a very talented wrestler. Every week, I'm impressed by her abilities and how she tries harder to further her wrestling repertoire. The women's division needs more air time on *Raw* and the Raw PPVs. Also, I think they could even have more female wrestlers join the ranks. Alexis Laree, April Hunter, and Kimona Wana-Laya would be great additions. Also, for a little more T & A, you could bring in Major Gunns. All I'm saying is WWE fans should give the women more respect, and WWE executives should give them more air time.

Stevenadd1008@aol.com

Yes, in an effort to get people to respect the WWE women's division more, why not sign Kimona Wana-Laya? ECW fans used to love to watch her, *um,* wrestle. Sure.

Dear ?,

I almost believed that you really cared about women's wrestling, but then you blew it by listing Kimona Wana-Laya and Major Gunns as potential competitors. Admit it, you don't really care that Alexis Laree is a great wrestler; you only care about her face and her body. Go back to reading your apartment wrestling magazines and leave the WWE divas alone, you pervert.

Dear Brandi,

I purchased WrestleMania and was expecting great matches. I turned out to be very disappointed with most of the show. With the exception of the brand title matches and cruiserweight open, all of the matches were very forgettable. I was extremely disappointed by Lesnar vs. Goldberg. I was actually expecting a decent match, but all we got was Lesnar and Goldberg shoving each other for a very long time.

I don't understand what happened to these two. I wasn't expecting much from Goldberg, but it was Lesnar's last match in WWE for a long time. We all know that he is capable of doing much better. If that was his last match, then he went out in a horrible way.

What was with The Undertaker? I thought he was supposed to come back from the dark side. The only difference is that he dyed his hair and grew it a little longer.

Oh, and to Kendall "The Sycho" Nickens, how can you brag about being a backyard wrestling champion?

BILL NYESCIENCEGUY
giantrule2003@yahoo.com

Dear Bill,

First off, I love your show. It's quite educational. I never pegged you as a wrestling fan, though. It's been scientifically proven that Goldberg and Lesnar couldn't have cared less about their final match at WM XX. It's also a fact that both men never cared about the fans, the business, or anything beyond making bank. As a smart man, I find it amazing that you'd think either of those slugs would give you anything more than a crappy match.

The Undertaker's return was more than just a new hairdo. Didn't you notice the fat guy with the urn? How about the druids and creepy music? How about the lack of selling? For as smart as you are, I'm shocked that you can't see 'Taker for what he is: a timeless character.

As for Nickens, the only thing more embarrassing than a backyard champion is someone who steals a famous person's name for his e-mail name.

Brandi,

Sitting here watching the little bit of *Smackdown* I can stomach, I was hit with an epiphany! What is the difference between current and past champions? What makes those old school champs seem somewhat bigger and brighter? *Losing!* All great champs of the past—Flair, Hart, Sammartino, Thesz, Hogan—all these guys won *and* lost their titles with some regularity, thus giving the fan the idea that every match was an important one to watch because the champ was not guaranteed a win. Thanks to Uncle Eric and the WCW hype machine, we got Goldberg the invincible, and it ruined it for us all. So instead of coming out and addressing the fact that he got beat, Lesnar comes out and *cries?* No challenge. No humility. Just whining. Nobody can identify with a champ losing to another wrestler on a given day and then saying, "Hey, nice job. Let's do it again. This time I'll be ready." Everyone wants the monster now! What about the regular guy who just tries harder? Is this the future of the sport? Maybe, *just* maybe, if the people had a champ to really believe in, Vince could once again capture lightning in a bottle!

Sublimedisorder@aol.com

Ric Flair wasn't one of the greatest champs ever because he lost a lot of world titles, but because he always seemed like he could lose, but rarely did. There's a big difference, though it might be hard for you to understand.

Dear Sublime,

You're right. That almost eight-year title reign of Bruno's was *real* competitive. So was Thesz' last reign as NWA champ, which lasted almost three years. Heck, let's throw in Fabulous Moolah's 28-year reign as WWF women's champ and call that competitive. Losing wasn't what made past champions great. It was the appearance of being vulnerable that did it. Flair's greatness was firmly rooted in his ability to make everyone around him believe he was about to lose. Of course, he'd almost always walk away with the belt in tow, but there would be at least a handful of times during any match that it was conceivable that he could lose. That is the mark of a true champion.

Letter of the month (taken verbatim from the actual letter to share my torture with you all):

Dear Brandi,

I am one of your biggest fans, I am also a huge Gino Hernandez fan. In the 80s was a teenage girl in love with Gino Hernandez, being that young I didn't appreciate his wrestling skill because my eyes were alway's glued to his gorgeous face. I never got to meet him something I alway's dreamed of as a teenager, thank you for giving him the credit he deserves.

Oh by the way Brandi "Happy 10th Annaversary" of "Off the top rope. I think your witty comedy and the way you tear apart your critics in such a sophistacated manner adds so much pizazz to PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED. I have Four questions I wanted to ask you Brandi.

1. Is there a Gino Hernandez Fan Club? If so, who do I contact to join?

[Questions on other side]

2. What was Gino Hernandez like in person?

3. Of all the mailbags you've done in the past 10 years, what was the worst irritating most obnoxious letter you recieved. (I hope it's not this one).

4. Speaking of obnoxious, of all the big mouths in the WWE which wrestlers does Brandi Mankiewicz feel deserves to have their mouths taped up the most. One male wrestler and one diva, it's a good question for you Brandi because your alway's zippering the mouths of your critics with witty comebacks.

Keep up the good work

Your fan,
JODI MARON
Staten Island, N.Y.

Dear Fan,

***Um,* thanks for the "Happy Anniversary" wishes, but you're very wrong. "Top Rope" started in the very first issue of *PWI,* with Dan Shocket holding the poison pen. I took over in the February 1997 issue when Eddie Ellner's picture was posted on the back of a milk carton to announce that he was officially missing. I have no idea what 10th anniversary you're thinking about with that little dust mite-ridden head of yours.**

Now, on to your questions: 1. Gino's dead, so fan clubs should all be outlawed. 2. I never met Gino. The closest I came to it was seeing his grave in Texas a few years ago. 3. Every letter that is poorly written irritates me. 4. I'm a hater and hate everybody. Hate. Hate. Hate. I should be the Player Hater of the Year. Take that, Dave Chappelle! □

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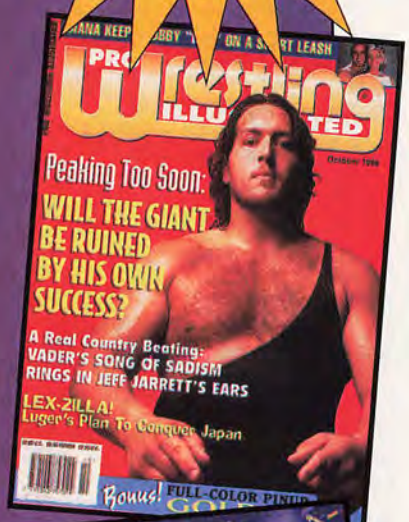

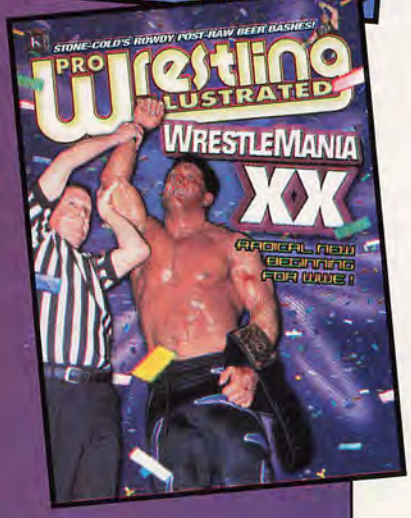

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May 1990: Hulk Hogan: Primed And Ready For WrestleMania VI. Centerfold: Great Muta. Plus: Piper-Rude, Eric Embry, Rock 'n' Rolls, Sid Vicious, pain.

July 1990: The Maturing Of Lex Luger: The "Total Package" Becomes The People's Choice. Centerfold: Rick Martel. Plus: Skyscrapers, Bobby Heenan, Mr. Saito, referees.

September 1990: The Hulkster's Wrath: 7,000 Miles To Violent Redemption. Centerfold: The Steiners. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Sting, Destruction Crew, Four Horsemen, Curt Hennig.

October 1990: Sting's Painful Lesson: You'll Have No Friends At The Top. Centerfold: Brutus Beefcake. Plus: Orndorff-Blanchard, Tugboat, Teddy Long, Ultimate Warrior, Road Warriors.

April 1991: Sgt. Slaughter Guilty Of Treason! Centerfold: Tom Zenk. Plus: Sting, Magnum T.A., Jesse Ventura, Lawler-Gilbert, Hogan & Warrior.

June 1991: Hulk Hogan: America's Hero. Centerfold: Hacksaw Duggan. Plus: Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Nasty Boys, Steiners, Simmons-Reed.

July 1991: The War Is Over! Hulk Hogan Liberates The WWF Belt From Sgt. Slaughter! Centerfold: Brian Pillman. Plus: Horsemen, Lex Luger, Eric Embry, Demolition.

August 1991 (Special Issue): Supercards '91. Centerfold: Hulk Hogan. Plus: WrestleMania VII, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior, Owen Hart, Koloff-Luger.

October 1991: Sid Justice: The Second Coming Of Hulk Hogan. Centerfold: Lex Luger. Plus: Hogan-Slaughter, Terrence Taylor, Barry Windham, Williams-Bigelow.

November 1991: Your Wedding Gift For Savage & Elizabeth: Help Lift The "Macho Man's" Suspension! Centerfold: Bobby Eaton. Plus: Tito Santana, Bushwhackers, Jushin Liger, Brian Pillman.

February 1992: Has Hulk Hogan Had Enough? Centerfold: 1992 calendar. Plus: Sting, Justice-Roberts, hot prospects, Eddie Gilbert.

May 1992: Revitalized In Tokyo: Hulk Hogan Is Super-Psyched For WrestleMania VII! Centerfold: Rick Rude. Plus: Sting & Muta-Steiners, Jarrett & Fuller, Lightning Kid, Randy Savage, intimidation.

June 1992: Exclusive *PWI* Interview: Roddy Piper Speaks Out! Centerfold: Dustin Rhodes. Plus: Dangerously-Sting, Abdullah-Cactus, Sid Justice, Randy Savage.

July 1992: The Best Of The Best—The Masters Of Their Craft. Centerfold: Randy Savage. Plus: Liger-Pillman, Jim Neidhart, U.S.-Japan, Ric Flair.

September 1992: Savage vs. Sting: Why It Isn't That Unlikely. Centerfold: Nikita Koloff. Plus: Steiners, Barry Windham, Sid Justice, Hodge & Weston, Shawn Michaels.

February 1993: No One Can Cut Down Razor Ramon. Centerfold: Curt Hennig. Plus: Jake Roberts, Pillman-Dustin, Ric Flair-Road Warriors, Rick Rude, Snuka-Muraco.

May 1993: WrestleMania Without Hulk Hogan? Centerfold: The Undertaker. Plus: Ron Simmons, Cactus Jack, Madusa-Sherri, WCW-New Japan, Ultimate Warrior.

May 1996: Un-Natural! The WWF Has Finally Gone Too Far! Centerfold: Public Enemy. Plus: Jeff Jarrett, Dreamer-Raven, Dan Severn, Ric Flair, Giant.

October 1996: Peaking Too Soon: Will The Giant Be Ruined By His Own Success? Centerfold: Goldust. Plus: Big Van Vader, Ric Flair, Bulldog, Lex Luger.

February 1997: Mr. Perfect: "Shawn Michaels Stole My Life." Centerfold: "Psycho" Sid. Plus: Kroffat & Furnas, Vince McMahon, Randy Savage, New Razor & New Diesel.

February 1998: Sting vs. Hogan—The Match Of The Century! Centerfold: Hogan vs. Sting fight poster. Plus: 16-page Starrcade preview, Perry Saturn, Dude Love.

May 1998: Starrcade Scandal! We Hate To Say It ... But Give The Belt Back To Hogan. Centerfold: Ric Flair. Plus: Mero & Sable, Taz, Taka Michinoku.

June 1998 (Special Issue): The 1998 *PWI* Poll. Centerfold: Steve Austin. Plus: Sabu, Lex Luger, Sting, Rocky Maivia, Bill Goldberg.

July 1998: WWF vs. WCW: Which Is Better? Centerfold: Rocky Maivia. Plus: Benoit, Bill Goldberg, Ahmed Johnson.

October 1998: Bret Screws Bret, Part II. Centerfold: Hunter Hearst Helmsley. Plus: Jim Ross, Marcus Bagwell, WWF controversy, FBI.

Holiday 1998: *PWI* 500. Eighth Annual Special.

March 1999: 1998—The Year In Wrestling. 1998 In Review, Achievement '98 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 1999.

April 1999: The Crock! The Title Change That Screwed The World! Centerfold: Chris Jericho. Plus: Bill Goldberg, Tommy Dreamer, Booker T, more Unofficial/Officials.

May 1999: Who Holds The Key To WrestleMania XV? Centerfold: Konnan. Plus: Mark Henry, Sting-Nash, Bill Alfonso, Brian Hildebrand.

June 1999: The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mankind, Flair & Turner, VMac, Steiners, New Japan-UFO.

July 1999: Warning! This Team Will Self-Destruct In 15 Seconds! Centerfold: X-Pac. Plus: New Jack-Dudleys, Jesse James, Venis & Godfather, Sting-Bischoff-Flair.

August 1999: Supercards '99: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Super 8, Bam Bam Bigelow, Jerry Lawler, tag team wrestling.

September 1999: Why Stone-Cold Might Get Out While He's Still On Top! Centerfold: Sting. Plus: Kidman & Misterio, The Rock, Bret Hart, Taz-Sabu.

October 1999: Why The World Must Fear Scott Steiner, By Buff Bagwell. Centerfold: Mankind. Plus: Kane & X-Pac, The Godfather, Perry Saturn, 20th anniversary readers' poll.

November 1999: The Women Of The WWF: There's More To Their Power Than Their Looks. Centerfold: Owen Hart. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr., Roddy Piper, Steiners, Steve Austin.

December 1999: Steve Austin: "CEO This! I'm The Damn Champ!" Centerfold: Rey Misterio Jr. Plus: Randy Savage, Jimmy Hart, WCW youth, Billy Gunn.

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January 2000: The Millennium Man Mouths Off! An Unforgettable Hour With Chris Jericho! Centerfold: Taz. Plus: Chris Benoit, Sid-Goldberg, Triple-H.

February 2000: The Master Manipulator! How Stone-Cold Controls The WWF. Centerfold: Kane. Plus: Paul Heyman, Hogan-Bret-Sting-Luger.

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April 2000: Stone-Cold vs. The Rock: Let's Settle It At WrestleMania! Centerfold: Chris Benoit. Plus: Dallas Page, Goldberg-Vicious, more Unofficial awards.

May 2000: The Y2K *PWI* Poll. Plus: Mitsuharu Misawa, Triple-H, Bret Hart, Hollys, Chyna & Aysa, ECW returnees.

June 2000: Just Wondering, Steph ... Is Triple-H Worth Your Billion-Dollar Inheritance? Centerfold: The Rock. Plus: Heyman-Van Dam, Vader, NWO.

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August 2000: Supercards 2000: WWF WrestleMania, WCW Uncensored, ECW Living Dangerously. Plus: Rob Van Dam, greatest supercards, Super 8.

September 2000: Wrestle McMania! Why The Peace Can't Last. Centerfold: Jeff Jarrett. Plus: Eric Bischoff, Dudleys, Raven.

October 2000: Scott Steiner: The Superstar The WWF Let Slip Away. Centerfold: Rikishi. Plus: Shawn Michaels, Austin-Rock, Rhino-RVD.

November 2000: The Rock vs. Triple-H. Our Special 50-Category Analysis. Pinups: Extreme wrestling. Plus: Nash-Steiner-Hall, Hardcore Holly, wrestling too extreme?

December 2000: Head Hog! Does Undertaker Have Enough Gas In His Tank To Rumble To The Top? Centerfold: Dallas Page. Plus: Kurt Angle, Rikishi, Vampiro-Sting, Japan.

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January 2001: Who Does He Really Hate? Someone Will Pay For Austin's Pain! Plus: Steven Richards, Justin Credible, Gordon Solie, Jeff Jarrett, Arn-Sid.

February 2001 (116 Pages): The State Of The Game. Includes: The states of the WWF, WCW, ECW, independents, international, the business, the art

March 2001: Hulk Hogan: WWF Fans Want Him Back! Plus: Mike Awesome, Rikishi, Jerry Lynn, Elix Skipper, Triple-H.

April 2001 (116 Pages): 2000—The Year In Wrestling. Plus: 2000 In Review, Achievement'00 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2001.

May 2001: The WrestleMania Curse! Will The Great One Ever Win The Big One? Plus: Vince McMahon, William Regal, Page & Nash, Ivory, Lance Storm, ECW.

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August 2001 (116 Pages): Supercards 2001: WrestleMania X-Seven, WCW Night of Champions, Super 8. Plus: Big Show, Kane, Jeff Jarrett, Tommy Dreamer.

September 2001: WWF-WCW: The 10 Questions That Must Be Answered. Plus: Triple-H, Stacy Keibler, Paul Heyman, Matt Hardy.

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January 2002: There's Something About Lita—What Makes Her The WWF's "It" Girl. Plus: Jericho-Stephanie, Mark Henry, X-Pac, Triple-H, Undertaker.

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April 2002 (116 Pages): 2001—The Year In Wrestling. 2001 In Review, Achievement 2001 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2002.

May 2002: The Mania To End All Manias! What Will Wrestling Look Like By WrestleMania X-9? Plus: Trish Stratus, RVD, Russ Haas, Big Bossman, WWF comedy.

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September 2002: No Rock ... No Problem: The WWF Can Thrive Without The Great One. Plus: WWF draft, Billy Kidman, Sean O'Haire, Stanley Weston.

October 2002 (116 Pages): Mid-Year Report. Top 50 stories, grades, half-year awards, predictions. Plus: Lou Thesz, Francine, Edge.

November 2002: Stone-Cold Meltdown! Plus: Heyman & Lesnar, Lance Storm, NWA: TNA, DDP, A.J. Styles, Island Boys.

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April 2003 (116 Pages): 2002—The Year In Wrestling. 2002 In Review, Achievement 2002 awards, Unofficial/Official awards, predictions for 2003.

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June 2003 (116 Pages): The *PWI* Poll. Plus: Rey Misterio Jr.

August 2003 (116 Pages): Goldberg: He Has WWE Caught Between The Rock And A Hard Place! Plus: WrestleMania XIX, Shawn Michaels graduates, Paul London, Raven.

September 2003 (116 Pages): Guardian Angle: The One Superstar WWE Couldn't Afford To Lose. Plus: Hurricane, Sting, Kazarian-Sabin, Jeff Jarrett, Booker T, Brock Lesnar.

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June 2004: Chris Benoit Wins Raw Title! Radical New Beginning For WWE! Plus: WrestleMania XX, Steve Austin, TNA women, Chavo Guerrero.

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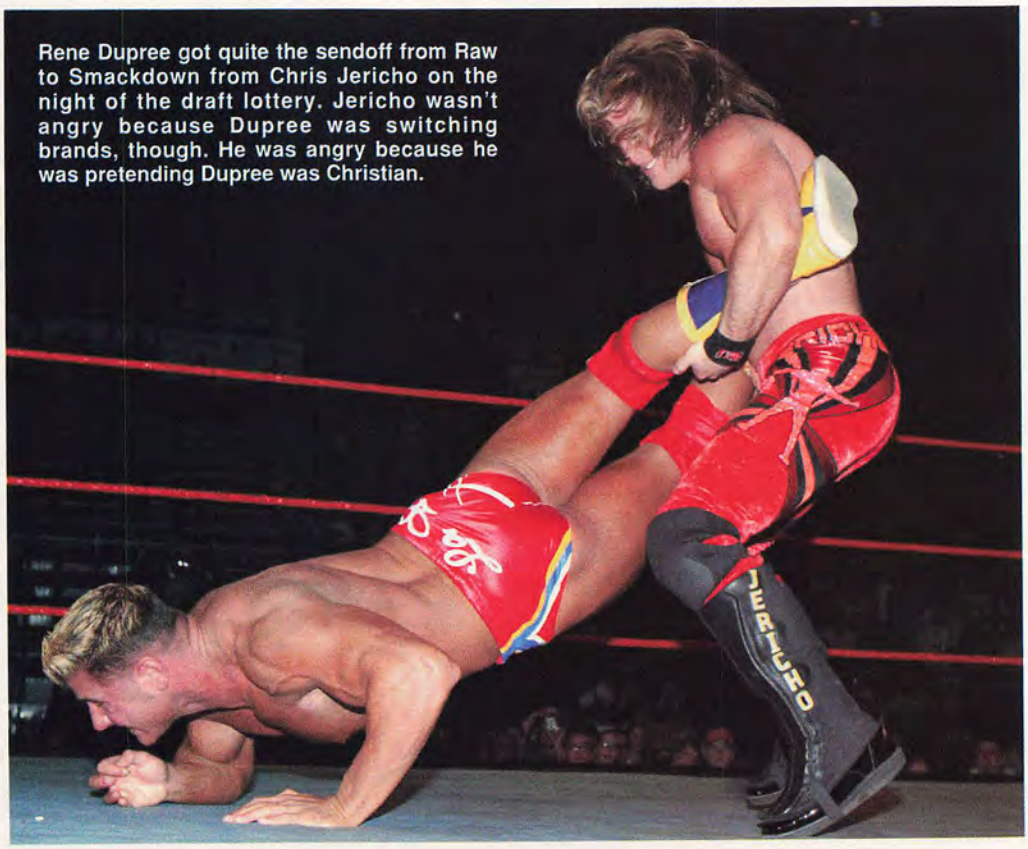
press conference...



Rene Dupree got quite the sendoff from Raw to Smackdown from Chris Jericho on the night of the draft lottery. Jericho wasn't angry because Dupree was switching brands, though. He was angry because he was pretending Dupree was Christian.

CHRIS JERICHO

HE DIDN'T SEE it coming. Trish Stratus turning against Chris Jericho was probably the most shocking moment of WrestleMania XX. Jericho was trying to defend Stratus' honor in that match, but instead, Stratus attacked Jericho, enabling Christian to gain a cheap victory over his former best friend. Why, Trish, why? It was Christian who remained unrepentant after his sick "bet" with Y2J came to light, and it was Christian who placed Stratus in the Walls of Jericho on ***Raw*** *and made no apologies for doing so.*

Jericho, on the other hand, was genuinely sorry. Or at least he seemed to be. He repeatedly apologized and saved Stratus from a number of harrowing situations in the ring. Moreover, Jericho chose Stratus over his creepy little buddy, Christian, who delighted in humiliating and hurting the five-time former women's champion on several occasions. Was this actually a turn-on for Trish? Or was she simply determined to make Jericho suffer for abusing their friendship?

But even if Jericho didn't win over Stratus' affections during this ordeal, he did regain the respect of Raw fans, who recognized that Y2J was sincerely trying to atone for his juvenile behavior. So now the battle lines are drawn: Jericho vs. his ex-friend Christian and his former flame Trish. With Christian and Trish flaunting their alliance of convenience on national television, Jericho grows angrier and angrier, and he often takes out his hostilities on the various opponents placed in front of him.

Unfortunately, this soap opera has postponed Jericho's championship aspirations. Since Smackdown drafted Rob Van Dam in the WWE lottery and acquired Booker T in a subsequent trade, the odds of Jericho challenging Raw champion Chris Benoit or Intercontinental champion Randy Orton should have increased considerably. But is his feud with Christian and Stratus bound to bog him down for months to come? Managing Editor Brandi Mankiewicz, Senior Writer Harry Burkett, and Contributing Writer Liz Hunter met with the former WWE undisputed champion in his hotel room after a recent Raw brand house show.

"Christian is one of the shallowest human beings I've ever met in my life. That's why I hung around the guy, because he's never complicated. Christian is out for himself at all times. Trish, well, she might be even more shallow than he is."

BRANDI MANKIEWICZ: First off, Chris, I have to say that you certainly do have style. It was a great idea for you to invite us to your hotel room for this interview. It provides a lovely backdrop.

CHRIS JERICHO: Hey, it was better than me going to that dark, dank, suffocating basement that you call an office. Everybody says Stu Hart's "Dungeon" was bad, but it was the Trump Plaza compared to your so-called editorial offices. Tell me, do all wrestling writers have to burrow underground?

MANKIEWICZ: Oh, Chris, we all wish we could be you. And we certainly don't mind taking an expense-paid excursion this afternoon. Maybe we can play a round of ping-pong when we're through. But let's get down to business. You've come clean on that bet you made with Christian earlier in the year, you know, the one where you were betting that you could, *uh*, woo Trish before Christian could woo Lita.

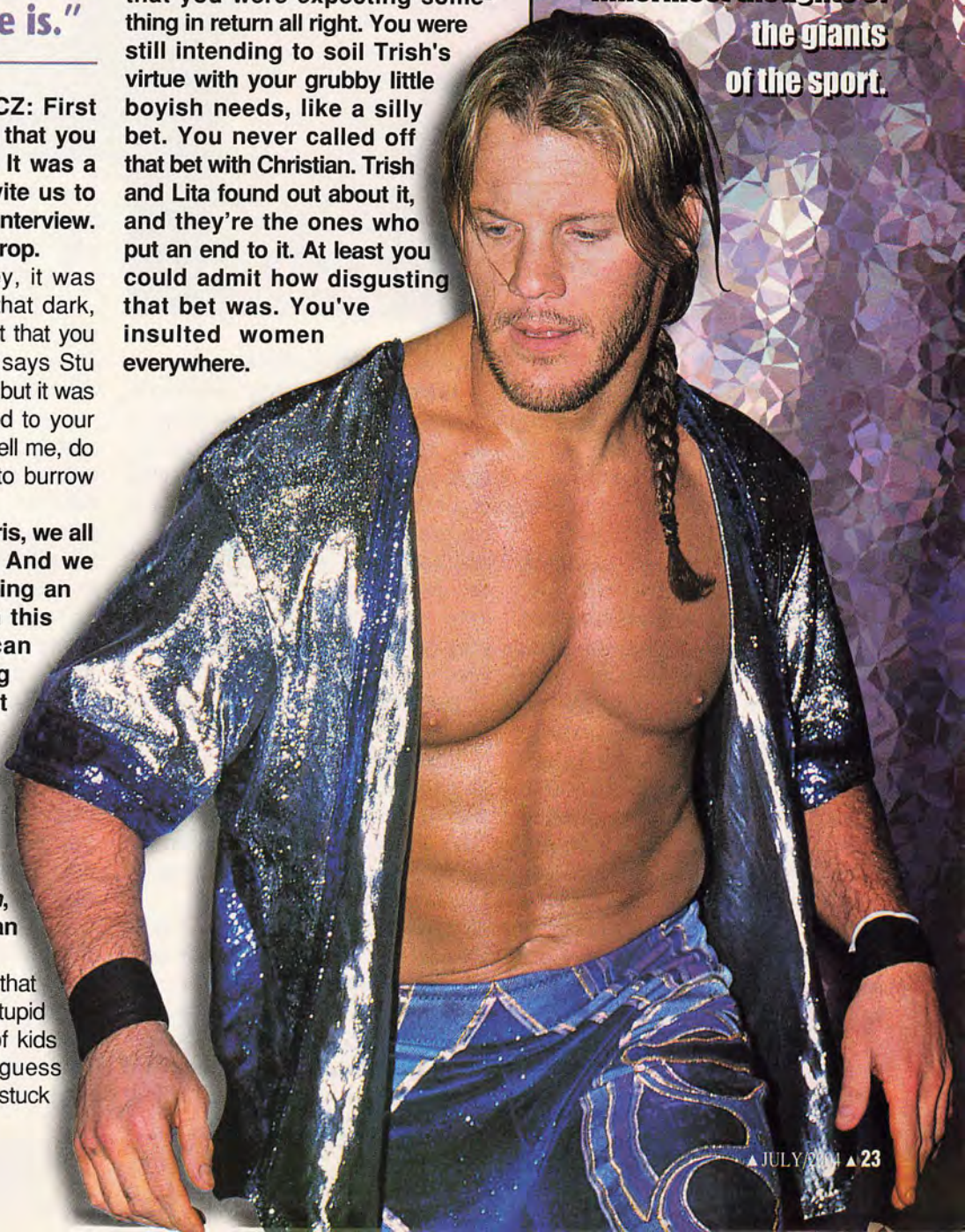
JERICHO: Woo … I like that word. Yes, it started as a stupid bet, kind of like a couple of kids on the playground. But I guess Christian and I should have stuck to writing on bathroom walls. It didn't go the way we planned.

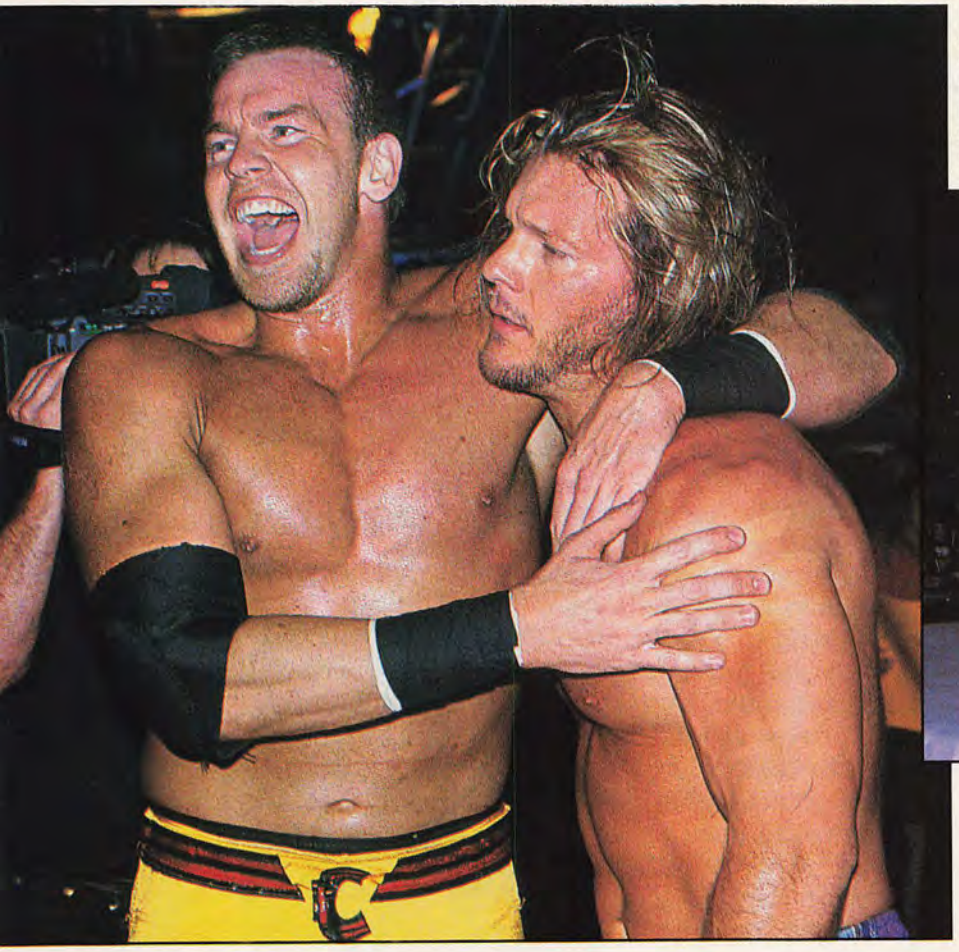
MANKIEWICZ: How so?

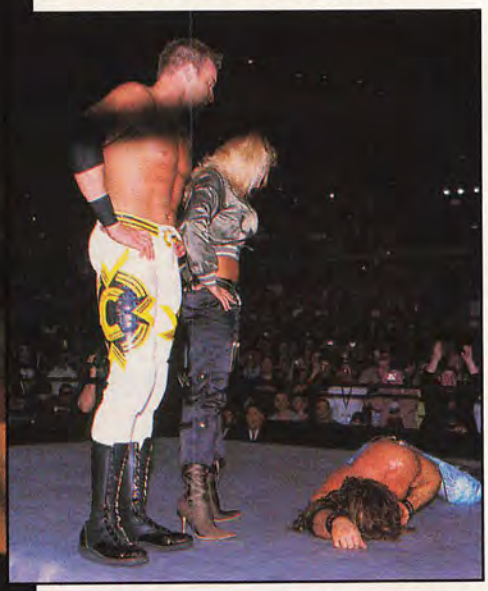
JERICHO: I started *wooing* Trish, as it were, and I really started liking her. I'm man enough to admit that to everyone. I found out that she was a wonderful person, or so I thought. There was a lot of openness there, we shared some things, but it didn't really develop beyond that point—and that was okay. It was kind of nice to bare our souls to each other and leave it there, without expecting anything in return.

LIZ HUNTER: Not expecting anything in return? It seems to me that you were expecting something in return all right. You were still intending to soil Trish's virtue with your grubby little boyish needs, like a silly bet. You never called off that bet with Christian. Trish and Lita found out about it, and they're the ones who put an end to it. At least you could admit how disgusting that bet was. You've insulted women everywhere.

Every issue, reporters from PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED will participate in an incisive press conference with a top wrestling star. The questions will be demanding. And the answers will reveal the innermost thoughts of the giants of the sport.







Remember the good times, right, Y2J? He and Christian seemed like the best of friends just a few months ago (left). And he thought he and Trish Stratus could be more than the best of pals. That is, until Stratus and the CLB left him beaten and humiliated at WrestleMania (below).

JERICHO: Wait a minute, Liz ... I think I smell something. Oh, I think your bra is burning. So, why don't you *pleeeeeeease* get the hell out of this room, grab the first fire extinguisher you see, and go far, far, far, far down the hallway to put it out!

HUNTER: Your lame attempts at humor won't work with me. You're the same animal who tied up Chyna in a chair and smashed her thumb with a hammer! I was the one who had to hold her injured hand, Chris! I was there when she found out she might never wrestle again. You and Christian having that disgusting bet is just the latest in a long line of shameful acts. But what do you do? You dismiss every serious charge with a flippant answer! It might work with fans, and it might even work with Brandi and Harry, but it doesn't work with me ...

MANKIEWICZ: I was afraid it would come to this. Liz, letting you come along was asking for trouble. I'm sorry, Chris ...

JERICHO: No, it's my pleasure to sit here and hear these diatribes. I very much enjoy listening to her inane, asinine, out-of-date, pathetic comments! I have listened to her crapola for years now! She was jealous because Chyna and I set aside our differences and became friends. Then she became jealous because I was getting along with Trish. Oh, don't you wish you could be me!

MANKIEWICZ: Let's change the subject.

JERICHO: Yeah, Liz, I heard all about your little "Press Conference" with Trish a couple of months ago. Trish was wavering, she was on the fence, but you took every opportunity to brainwash her against me.

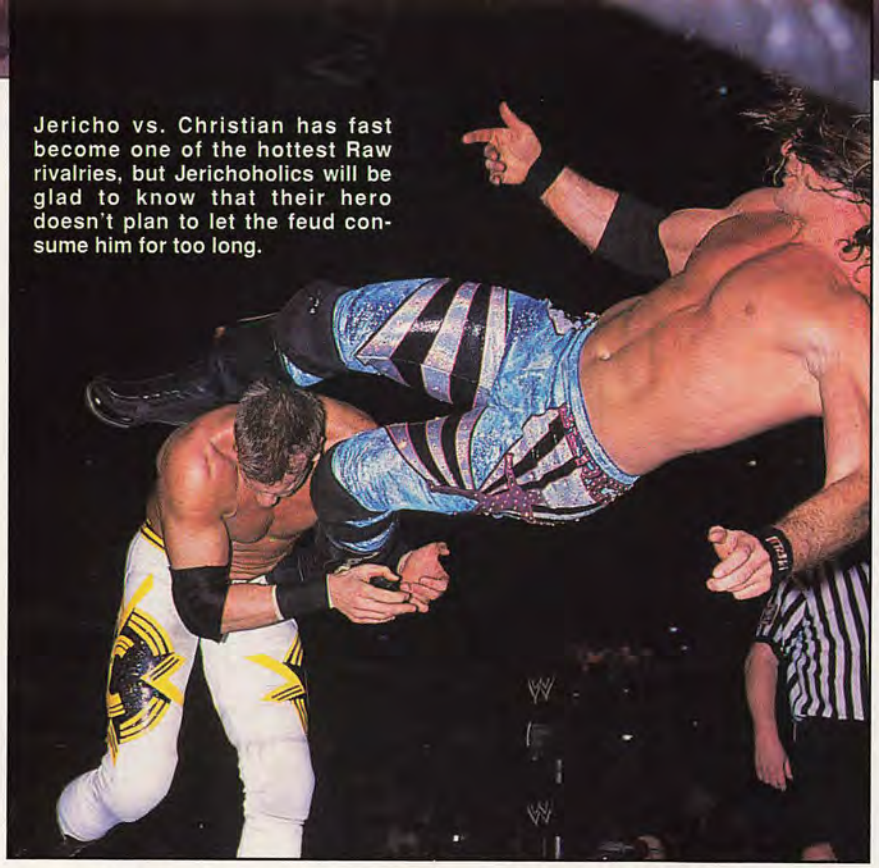
HUNTER: At the time, I was wondering if anything I was saying was actually getting through to her. I just put your career and your behavior in perspective. Obviously, Trish thought long and hard about what I said after she got home. I normally wouldn't have condoned what she did to you at WrestleMania, but part of me is glad she did it.

JERICHO: Hey, Burkhart, don't you have any questions to ask me? Or are you going to let these women completely destroy this interview?

HARRY BURKETT: Okay, let's just tone down the Jerry Springer circus and get down to a much calmer, more civilized atmosphere. I'm proud to say that we have interviewed all three players in this saga in "Press Conference" in recent months. Let me just share with you what both Christian and Trish have said about you in the past.

JERICHO: Go ahead, encyclopedia boy.

BURKETT: In our January 2004 issue, Christian was asked to play some word association. When asked to comment on you, Christian said, and I quote, "A good Canadian and an even better friend. My peeps are proud to support him in everything he does." Here are a few quotes from our interview with Trish in the May 2004 issue. She said things like, "When Chris tones it down,



Jericho vs. Christian has fast become one of the hottest Raw rivalries, but Jerichoholics will be glad to know that their hero doesn't plan to let the feud consume him for too long.

even that jerk side can be endearing in a way." She also said, in regard to your relationship, "There was some genuine sharing there." Here's another one, and maybe the most important: "Chris is trying to make things right. But how can things go back to the way they were?" What do all of those comments, from both Christian and Trish, suggest to you? Were they plotting against you all along? Is there any chance of you being friends with either one of them again?

JERICHO: First of all, I don't take any stock in what Christian said a few months ago or today. Christian is one of the shallowest human beings I've ever met in my life. That's why I hung around the guy, because he's never complicated. Christian is out for himself at all times. Trish, well, she might be even more shallow than he is. And those quotes bury her even further. She acknowledged in that very interview that I was trying to make things right. So it's not a matter of Trish not understanding my motivations. When she did what she did to me at WrestleMania, that's exactly the way she wanted it to go down.

MANKIEWICZ: So it's been a rough few months for you. But with Chris Benoit breaking through and winning the Raw title, Shelton Benjamin looking like he's going to be a major player for Raw, and Randy Orton moving up fast, it seems like a lot of people are in the running for that big gold belt. Aren't you at all worried that you're letting this silly feud distract you from taking your shot at the Raw title?

JERICHO: I understand your point, but I need to put this thing behind me first. I've beaten Triple-H, I've beaten Benoit, and you can't tell me you don't think I have what it takes to take down Orton or Batista or Shelton Benjamin, whoever. Everyone knows what Y2J can do. When I get this settled, I'll have no problem inserting myself into that title picture.

MANKIEWICZ: But what happens if you don't settle this feud the way you want to?

JERICHO: That's not a possibility that I'm even considering. It just won't happen. I'm madder than I've been in a hell of a long time, and they've never seen Chris Jericho mad ... not yet anyway. They have no idea what they've set themselves up for.

HUNTER: Why don't you ask him if he'll start sweet-talking Lita and try to hoodwink her into joining this fight with him?

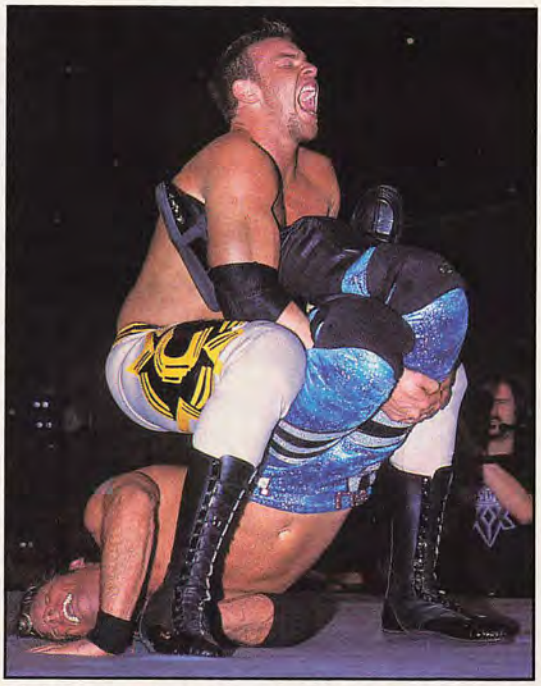
JERICHO: Good one, Liz, but I'm not going there.

BURKETT: So the bottom line is there's no chance of you and Trish getting back together?

JERICHO: No way! After she's played tonsil hockey with Christian? She's contaminated into infinity as far as I'm concerned. I'd like to say I wish them a long, miserable life together, but with two bottom-feeders like that, I can't imagine them being able to stand each other for more than a few months. But to get back to your question: There's about as much chance of me getting back with Trish as me hooking up with Liz Hunter!

HUNTER: You know there's no chance of that happening.

JERICHO: Indeed I do. □



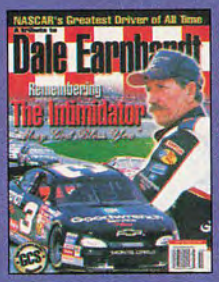
Christian has done a lot better than most people expected him to do in his matches with Jericho. In fact, Y2J probably underestimated him a bit. He might still be underestimating him and his evil girlfriend now.

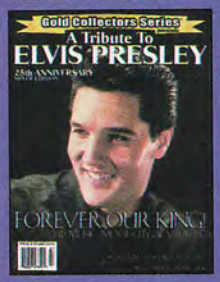
A Salute To THE LEGENDS

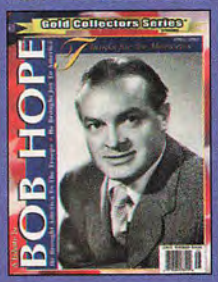
Dale Earnhardt. George Harrison. Elvis Presley. Bob Hope. Johnny Cash.

These men gave so much of themselves to the world, and their passing left a huge void for us all. Their deaths are to be mourned, but their lives are to be celebrated.

The publishers of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* are making these Gold Collectors Editions available so that we can relive their brilliance and honor their memory. This offering is being made only while our extremely limited inventory lasts.







Dale Earnhardt—His Legend Lives Forever: A nation mourns the greatest NASCAR driver ever.

Dale Earnhardt—Remembering The Intimidator: The one-of-a-kind driver more than lived up to his nickname.

George Harrison—The Quiet Beatle: His contribution to The Fab Four was often overlooked.

Elvis Presley—Forever Our King: A unique look back at Elvis' career on the 25th anniversary of his passing.

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Johnny Cash—The Man In Black: His influence on his fans and fellow musicians cannot be understated.

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WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS

Section compiled by Will Welsh

YOU PROBABLY KNEW who won each of the 12 matches at WrestleMania XX inside Madison Square Garden before your clock struck midnight on March 14. You more than likely ordered the pay-per-view, clicked on the appropriate channel at about 7 p.m. Eastern time that night, then sat back and soaked in the action for the next 280 minutes or so. You might have taped the show and gone back and watched it again (maybe several times) since then. If you didn't order the show, you probably called the *PWI* Hotline to get the results before retiring for the evening.

At the very least, you tuned in to *Raw* and *Smackdown* in the days that followed to check out the fallout from the biggest show of the year.

So you think you know all you need to know about WrestleMania XX by now, don't you? Not so fast, jabroni!

There's so much more to a match—especially a WrestleMania match—than simply who pinned whom and which wrestlers walked out of the arena with gold strapped around their waists. You never know all there is to know about WrestleMania—and never quite have the event in the proper perspective in your mind—until you read this annual section of ours. It's the definitive analysis of 'Mania, and this year, we've devoted more pages than ever to it!

We tackle the matches one by one and in chronological order. So that means we open with the opener, The Big Show defending the U.S. title against John Cena. You know by now that Cena won the U.S. title from Show, right? But was he one of the *real* winners of the bout? Well, in this case, he was. But we're here to tell you that The Big Show was one of the real winners of the match, too. How so? Flip ahead to page 28 to find out.

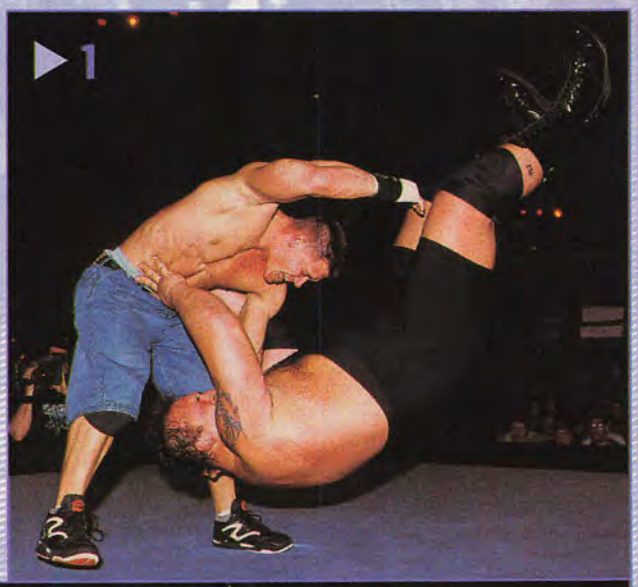
How could the Arena Football League have been one of the real winners of the Brock Lesnar-Bill Goldberg match? You can probably guess, but you'll want to check out our full analysis of that surreal showdown on page 44 anyway.

How could Paul Bearer have been one of the real winners *and* one of the real losers of the Undertaker vs. Kane match? It's simple … yet complicated. Turn to page 56. And how could Ring of Honor and NWA-TNA have been among the real losers in the thrilling Triple-H vs. Shawn Michaels vs. Chris Benoit main event? Find out on page 60.

As we tell you every year at this time, if you want the real story, you have to look very, *very* closely to find it.

THE MATCH: John Cena vs. The Big Show for the U.S. championship

THE ACTION: Cena got the Madison Square Garden fired up for this match with one of his trademark raps. He opened the match by locking up with Show, but Show threw him into the corner and then through the ropes with one hand. Cena responded by attacking Show with a top-rope cross-body-block, but Show caught him in mid-air and slammed him to the mat. The match went on in this manner for more than seven minutes. Cena would try to slip in some offense, but as soon as he would attempt it, Show would shut him back down. Show even showed off a couple of new holds and maneuvers, the most prominent being the cobra clutch, Sgt. Slaughter's old finisher.



To Cena's credit, he continued fighting against the former WCW and WWE champion. Beginning at 7:20, he earned his first sustained offensive push of the match. He delivered body shots to Show's huge torso as well as a tough clothesline, but Show wouldn't fall. Then, at the eight-minute mark, Cena delivered the move of the match: an unbelievable FU! Cena immediately went for the cover, but Show kicked out, leaving Cena stunned in the corner. He had hit Show with his best move, and the big man kicked out.

After about 15 seconds, Cena got a maniacal look on his face and strode to his corner, where his steel neck chain was waiting for him. He picked it up, but referee Jimmy Korderas forced him to toss it aside. When he did, Korderas turned away from the action to remove it from the ring, allowing Cena to knock Show out cold with a pair of brass knuckles. A second FU later, the 'Mania XX opener was in the books.

ACTION: B

SIGNIFICANCE: B-

THE WINNER: Cena, who pinned Show at 9:12 to win the U.S. championship

THE REAL WINNER: The Big Show, who can now go after the Smackdown championship. Being the U.S. champion was no big deal to him. Now that he doesn't have to worry about defending it, he can try to return to main event status. The U.S. title was only weighing him down. And remember whom he beat for that U.S. title last October …

THE REAL LOSER: Eddie Guerrero, who will be forced to defend his Smackdown championship against a man twice his size.

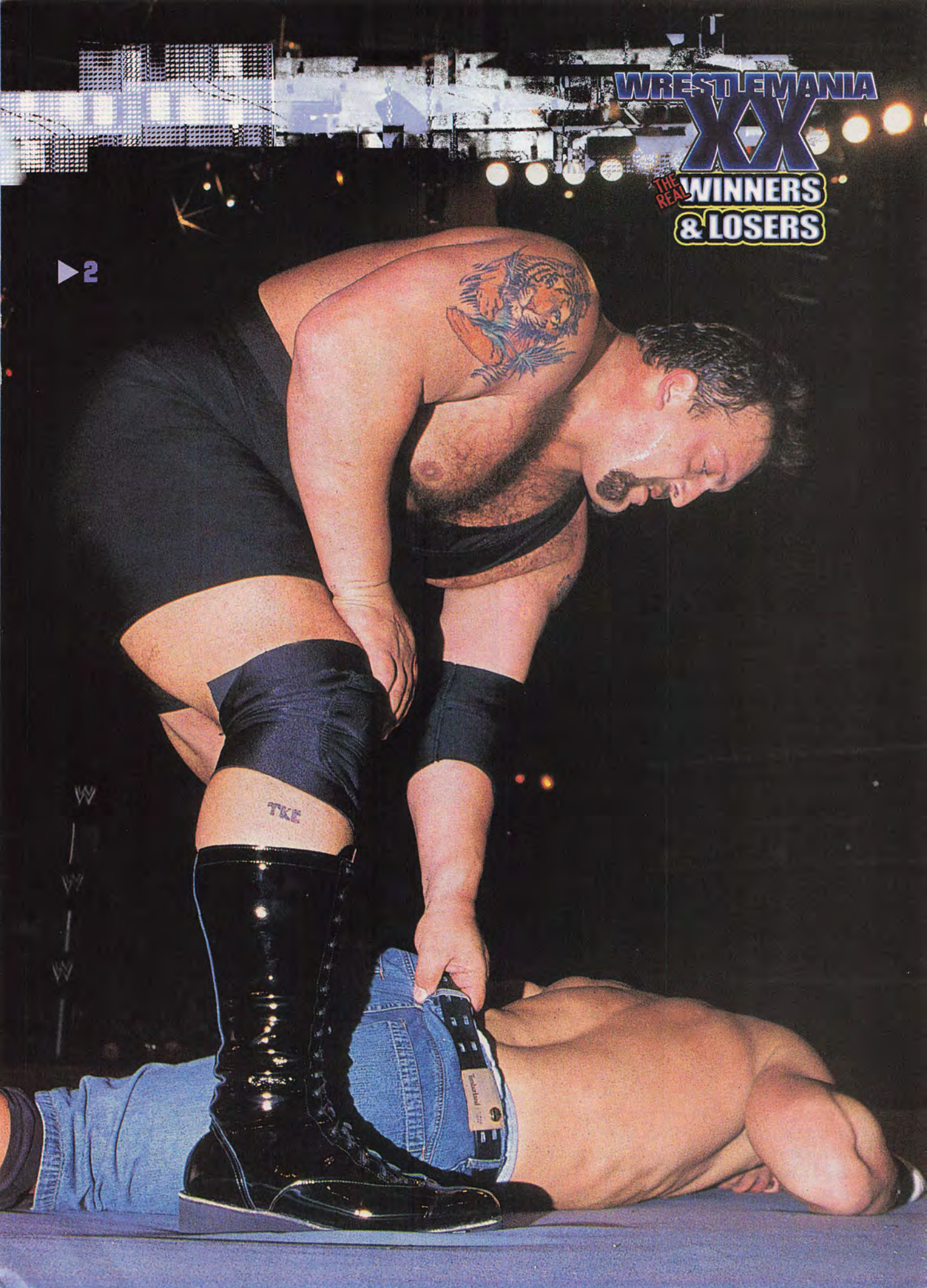
ANOTHER WINNER: The U.S. title, which began looking a whole lot cooler from the second Cena started carrying it around. This is one of those rare times when the title is going to get the rub from the wrestler and not the other way around.

AND YET ANOTHER WINNER: Cena, who can prove to WWE that he's ready for bigger and better things with a strong showing as U.S. champion. Even though he already has a huge fan following, WWE execs aren't quite sold on his ability to become a full-time championship main-eventer. A nice run as U.S. champion will allow him to show off his championships skills.

▶ 1—It's not easy for anyone—not even someone with Cena's strength—to slam the not-so-gentle giant.

▶ 2—Show almost looked like he was toying with Cena at times. That would come back to haunt him in the end.

▶ 3—After two FUs of the mighty 500-pounder, Cena had done more than enough to wrap up his first championship in WWE.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THE MATCH: Booker T and Rob Van Dam vs. La Resistance vs. Mark Jindrak and Garrison Cade vs. The Dudley Boyz in a fatal four-way match for the Raw tag team title

THE ACTION: Van Dam started off this fatal four-way by squaring off with La Resistance's Rene Dupree. RVD got the early upper hand by throwing Dupree into the corner, driving his shoulder into Dupree's gut twice, and then monkey-flipping him more than halfway across the ring. A quick tag to Booker allowed RVD to catapult Dupree into a rare Booker T superkick.

Dupree, caught in the Dudleys' corner, quickly tagged in Buh Buh Ray to make his escape. Buh Buh worked over Booker along the ropes, then scored with a neckbreaker at 1:45. Not long thereafter, the match broke down into a series of blind tags, with the only constant being Booker T's isolation from RVD. La Resistance, the Dudleys, and Jindrak and Cade each took a turn beating on the five-time former WCW champ. It wasn't until 5:45 that Booker created an opening for himself with a terrific spinebuster on Conway. Booker rolled to his corner and tagged in RVD, who immediately began taking on La Resistance, Jindrak, and Cade simultaneously.

About seven minutes into the match, the Dudleys began double-teaming Booker and were prepared to end the match with a 3D, but Cade saved Booker by knocking Buh Buh out of the ring before the maneuver could be completed. Cade rolled out of the ring, and Conway, the legal man, came back in—only to be greeted by a Booker T scissors kick. RVD, sensing it was time to put away the match, ascended to the top turnbuckle and hit his five-star frog splash.

ACTION: B-

SIGNIFICANCE: C+

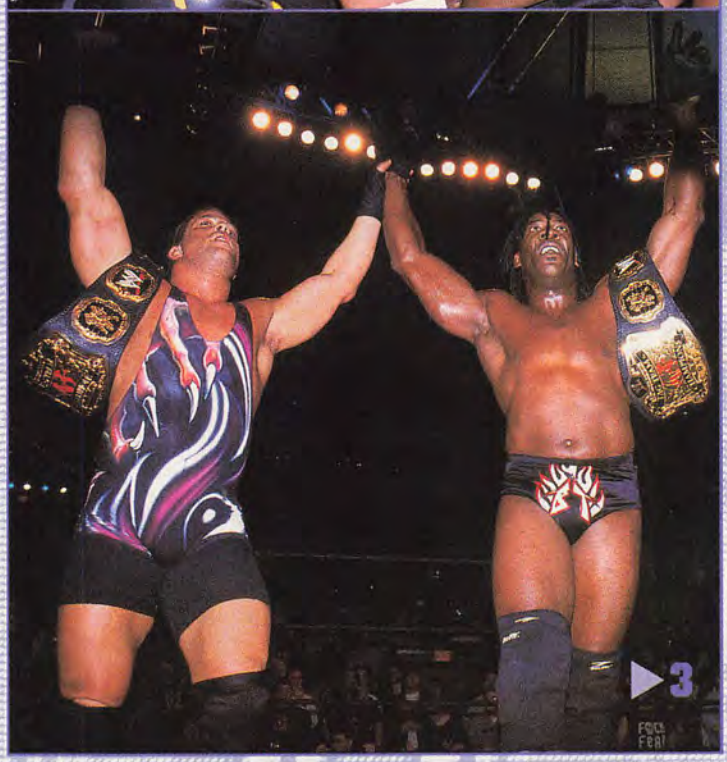
THE WINNERS: RVD and Booker T, when RVD pinned Conway at 7:51

THE REAL WINNERS: Conway, Dupree, Jindrak, and Cade, who didn't look out of place even a little bit in a WrestleMania tag team title match against the more experienced Dudley Boyz and Booker T and RVD. They might not always capture the attention of WWE fans, but there's no doubt that if these four men are given a decent chance at success, they could become a key part of WWE's future.

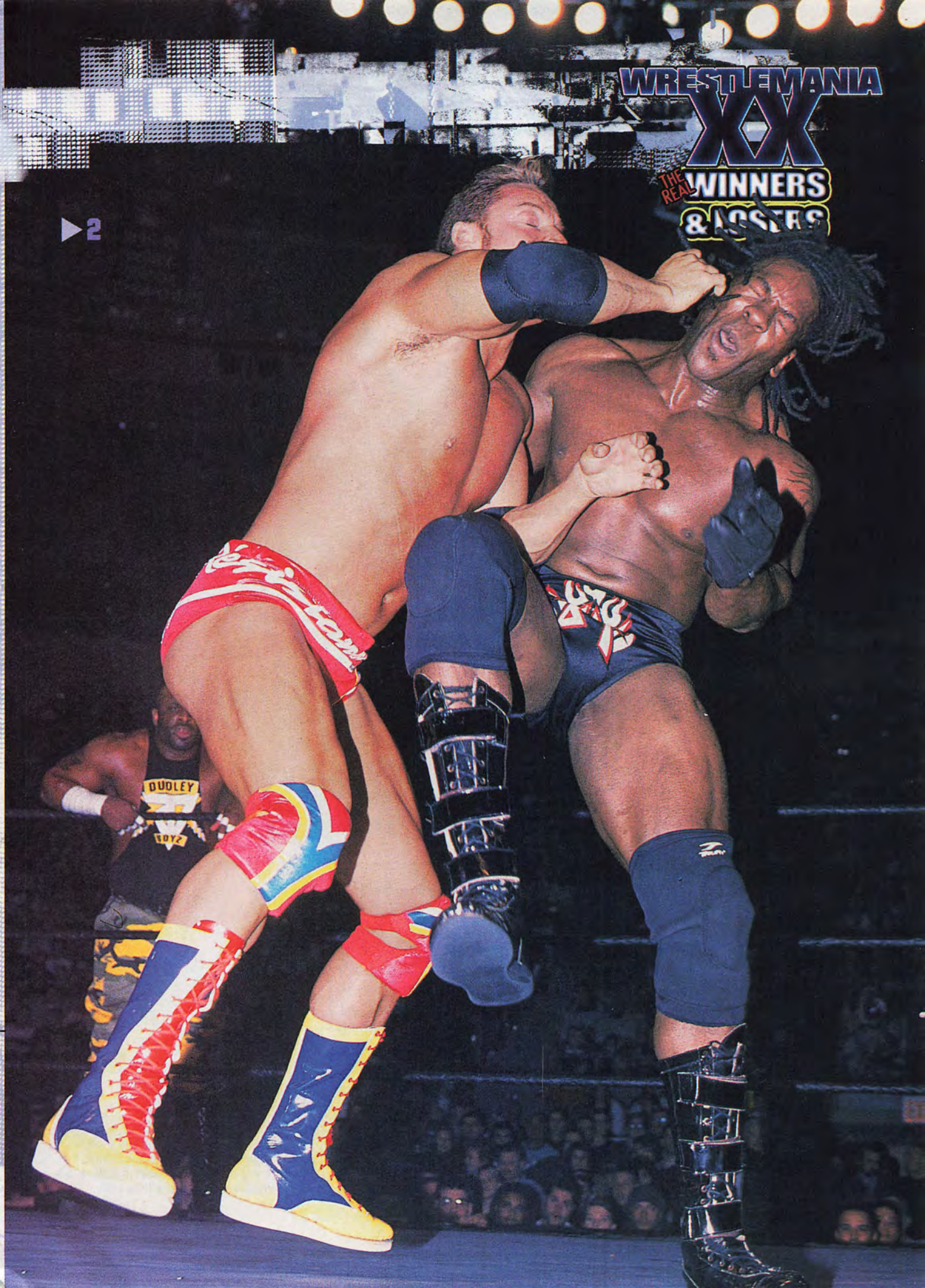
THE REAL LOSERS: The Dudley Boyz. The Dudleys are still a great tag team, but they're slowly losing their aura of being one of the greatest tag teams of all-time. And this match didn't do them any favors. They might have been the least involved of all the teams.

MORE WINNERS: La Resistance, who were easily the most fluid tag team of the four. RVD and Booker may have walked away with the win and the gold, but La Resistance walked away from the match looking like the more cohesive team. Too bad it's such a lousy gimmick.

MORE LOSERS: RVD and Booker T, who should be headlining main events, not four-way tag team matches.



▶1—A staredown between D-Von Dudley and Booker T really didn't develop into much.
▶2—It's gut check time for Rob Conway as he catches a knee from Booker T.
▶3—The champs kept the gold, but did they really gain much by winning?


WRESTLEMANIA
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THE REAL WINNERS
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THE MATCH: Chris Jericho vs. Christian

THE ACTION: Jericho and Christian began the match jawing at each other, as both seemed a little hesitant to get the match underway. Christian tried to intimidate Jericho by giving him a good shove in the corner, but Jericho responded by dropping his former buddy with a stiff right hand to the jaw and then tackling him. He continued his assault with a back elbow and a belly-to-back suplex that left Christian holding his neck.

Christian tried to recover, but he couldn't do anything right in the early going. Whatever he attempted, Jericho countered. He even tried to throw Jericho to the outside, but Jericho caught himself, taunted Christian to come over, and then back bodydropped him to the outside. After a short respite, Jericho ran to the top turnbuckle and launched himself onto the unsuspecting Christian, who had been picking himself up on the outside.

Christian finally got in some offense at 3:24 when he dropped Jericho over the top rope and to the outside. The desperation move allowed him to catch his breath and mount a sustained attack. Y2J tried to fight back and build some speed inside the ring, but Christian caught him by the hair and yanked him back down to the mat. Afterward, Christian showed off wisps of Jericho's hair that he had ripped out of his head.

Christian maintained control until 6:55, when he and Jericho mistakenly ran into each other and knocked heads. Jericho got off the mat first, draped Christian's neck over the second rope, then dumped his entire weight across Christian's body before nailing him with an enzuigiri to the back of the head for a two-count. A Northern lights suplex at 8:35 also earned Jericho a two-count.

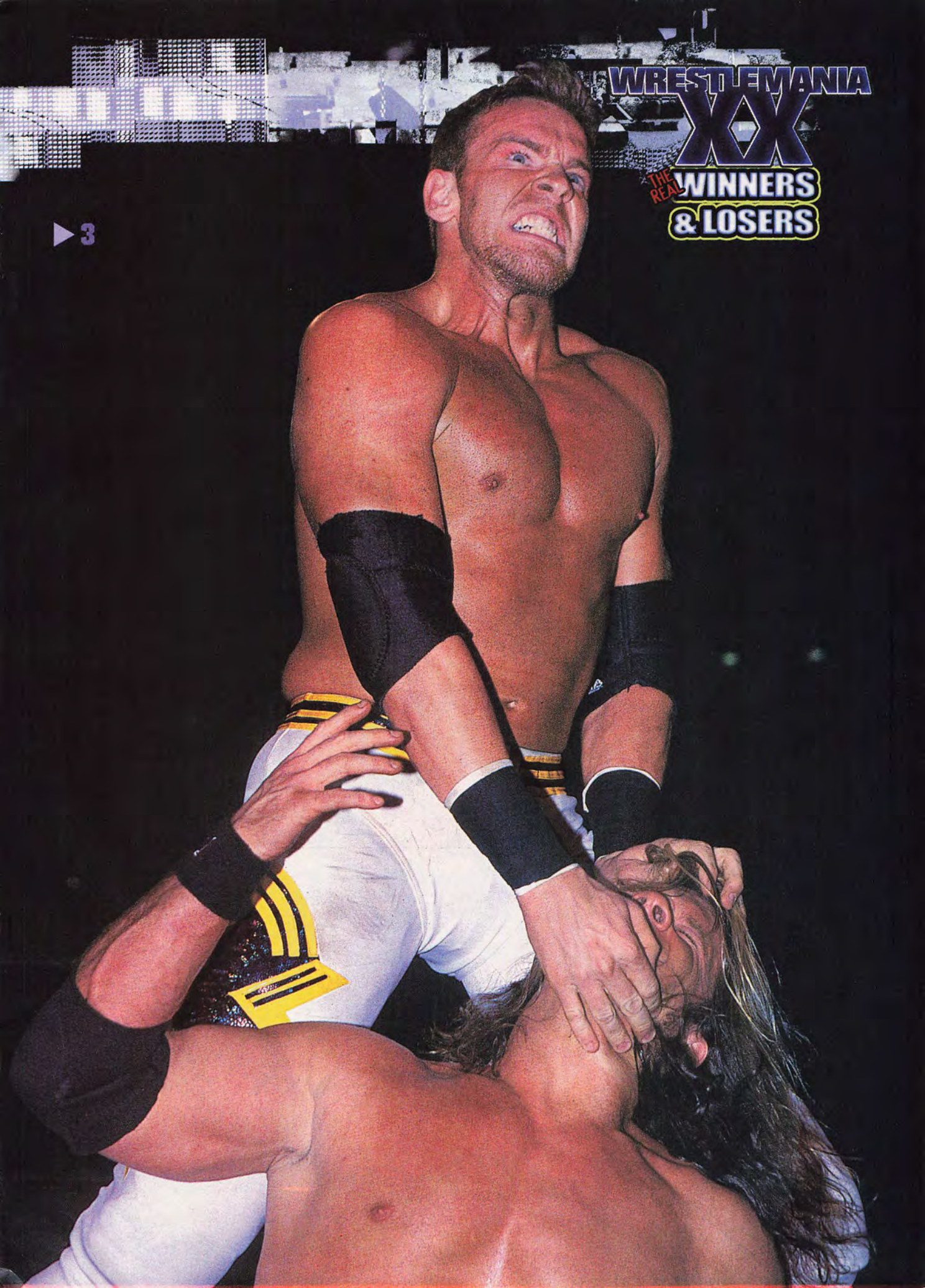
The match went back and forth for the next several minutes, with one turning point coming when Christian caught Jericho going for a superplex. Christian threw his opponent down hard, tweaking Jericho's previously injured knee. Christian directed his assault at the knee, first by kicking it and then by wrapping it up with a Texas cloverleaf—a hold he probably picked up while scouting tapes of Jericho when Dean Malenko was his primary nemesis. Jericho broke the hold after about 20 seconds by reversing it into the Walls of Jericho. He then refused to release it as Christian squirmed outside the ring. With Christian's back aching, Jericho brought him back into the ring with a double-armed suplex from the top rope at 13:05.

Trish Stratus, the focal point of the Jericho-Christian feud, ran down to ringside at 13:30 and began cheering on Y2J. However, her presence seemed to invigorate *Christian,* who got a two-count on Jericho following

▶ 1—Ah, if only the two-count Jericho got with a gorgeous Northern Lights suplex could have been extended to three.
▶ 2—Christian wasn't about to let his old buddy (and now enemy) outclass him on the mat.
▶ 3—Christian had been a pain in the neck to Jericho for a while, but never more so than he was at WrestleMania and still is now.

WRESTLEMANIA XX

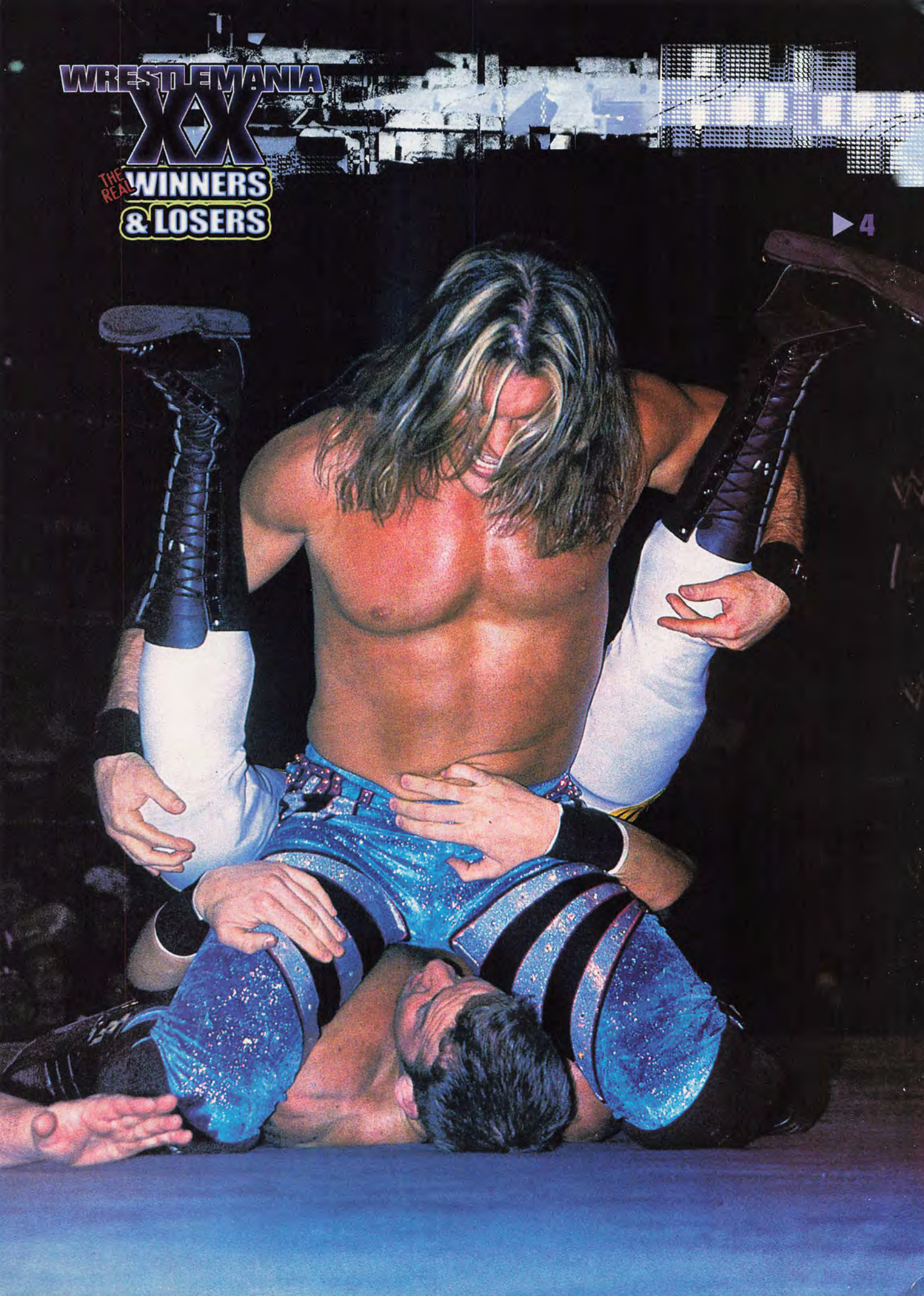
THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS

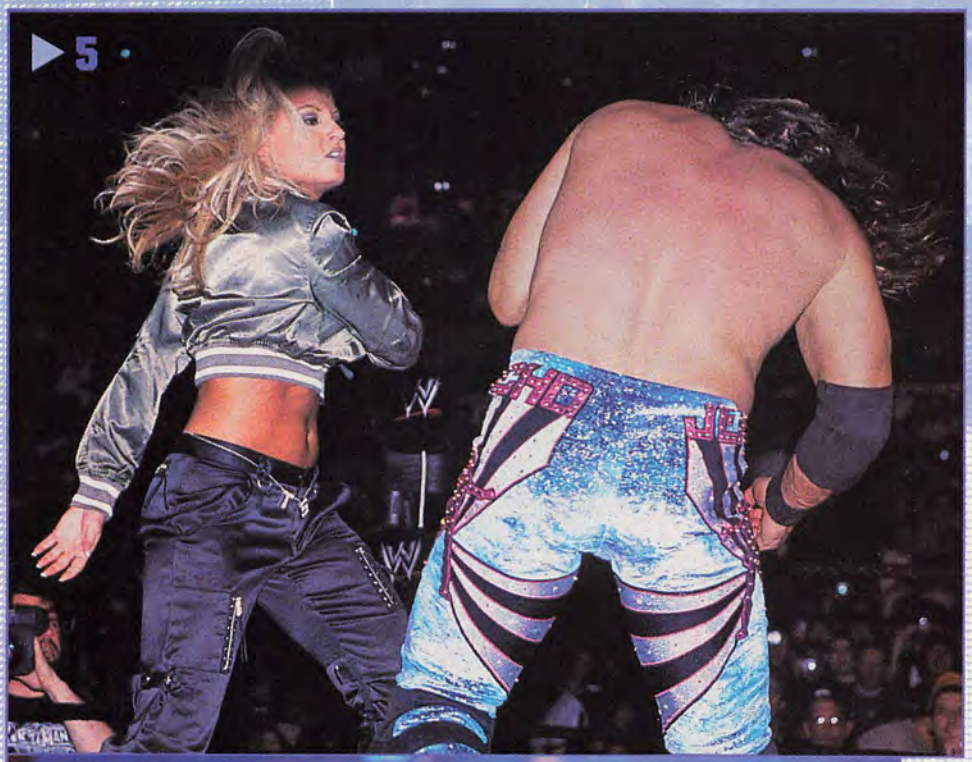


WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS

▶4





a spike piledriver. Stratus then climbed onto the ring apron and began arguing with Christian. Christian pulled her into the ring, only to push her down into the corner. Seeing this, Jericho tackled Christian out of the ring. When he went to check on Stratus, though, she "mistakenly" nailed him with a back elbow, allowing Christian to run back into the ring and roll up Jericho for the win. After the match, with the Madison Square Garden crowd chanting, "Kiss her! Kiss her!" Stratus walloped Jericho with two hard slaps to the face before Christian ran back into the ring and drove Y2J's head to the mat with an unprettier.

ACTION: A
SIGNIFICANCE: A
THE WINNER: Christian pinned Jericho at 14:50

THE REAL WINNER: Christian, who has been close to the top tier before, was just lacking a feud that would allow him to show off his skills as a potential main-eventer. Maybe now that he has performed well in a high-profile storyline, WWE will give him further chances to test his potential in the top tier. It's arguable that he has already surpassed Jericho in WWE's pecking order since the start of the Stratus storyline.

THE REAL LOSER: Jericho, who wound up looking like he had just been punked by Ashton Kutcher. Not only did he get slapped in the face twice by Stratus, not only did he suffer the humiliation of a post-match unprettier, he also lost the stinkin' match! WrestleMania XX may go down in history as one of the greatest WrestleManias of all-time, but there's no doubt that Jericho already wants to forget it.

ANOTHER LOSER: Canada, which just lost its most beautiful WWE diva to the dark side.

TWO MORE WINNERS: Victoria and Lita, who should see their stock as fan favorites rise now that the most popular diva has become the most hated.

YET ANOTHER WINNER: The WWE women's division, which should get some much-needed freshening now that Stratus is a heel.

▶ 4—Those pesky shoulders of Christian just won't stay glued to the canvas!
▶ 5—Two slaps from Trish Stratus just made a horrible WrestleMania for Y2J that much worse.
▶ 6—The new most evil couple in WWE ... looking wicked.

THE MATCH: Randy Orton, Batista, and Ric Flair vs. The Rock and Mick Foley in a handicap match

THE ACTION: As Foley made his way to the ring, there was something different about him. He wasn't the congenial, jovial, and thoughtful man we had gotten to know since his in-ring retirement four years earlier. His eyes looked more wild, as if the man behind them walked with felonious intent. As he waited for The Rock to join him at ringside, as he stared down the three members of Evolution who awaited him in the ring, we suddenly remembered who Mick Foley was before we knew him as Mick Foley.

Cactus Jack had come to play.

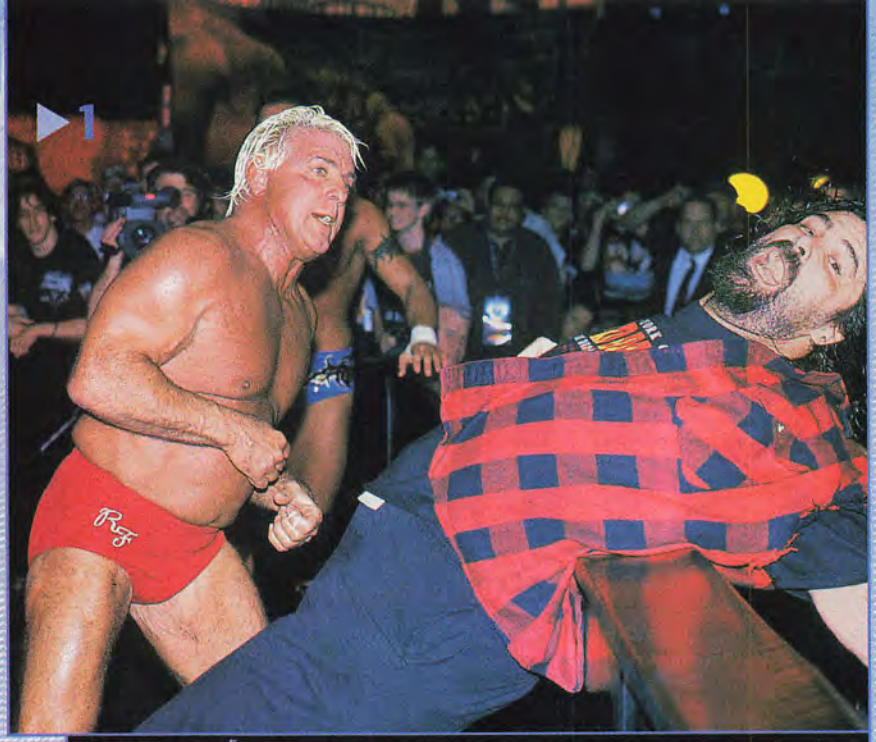
The match's opening moments were a wild scramble, but the referee eventually restored some semblance of order as Rock squared off against Flair. Flair lured Rock to the outside, where he poked him in the eye, but Rock recovered quickly and gave Flair a back bodydrop. Foley followed up with an elbowdrop off the ring apron, then saluted the crowd with Cactus Jack's trademark, "Bang! Bang!"

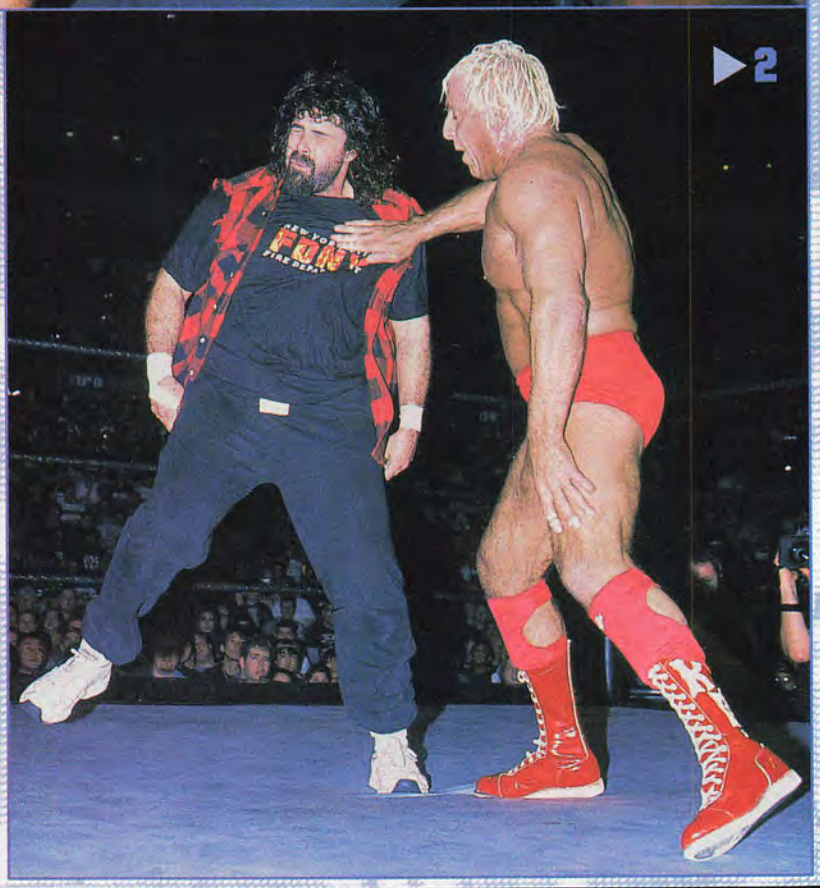
The match seesawed back and forth between the two teams until the 8:15 mark, when Orton threw Foley into and over the ring steps while the two brawled outside. Orton rolled Foley into the ring and tried to steal a pinfall, but he only secured a two-count. At 9:16, after Foley had been on the receiving end of another full minute of abuse, Flair tagged in and leveled him with a simple chop to the chest.

Finally, at 12:15, Foley tagged in the fresh Rock, who immediately began cleaning house. Flying forearm on Flair. DDT on Orton. Batista brought into the ring the hard way—over the top rope. Rock was laying the smack down as only he can—until he lost track of his opponents. Batista surprised him with a jarring spinebuster.

Then came perhaps the silliest moment of the entire evening. With Rock laying flat on his back in the middle of the ring, Flair took over. He kicked both of Rock's shoulders in. He waved his arms back and forth. He even pretended to take off an imaginary elbow pad—and then he pretended to throw it into the crowd! But when he went to bounce off the ropes to deliver the final sequence of the people's elbow, Rock kipped up and leveled him with numerous blows to the head. Then he delivered an honest-to-goodness people's elbow for a two-count.

The match turned at 15:30. With the referee on the outside trying to pre-

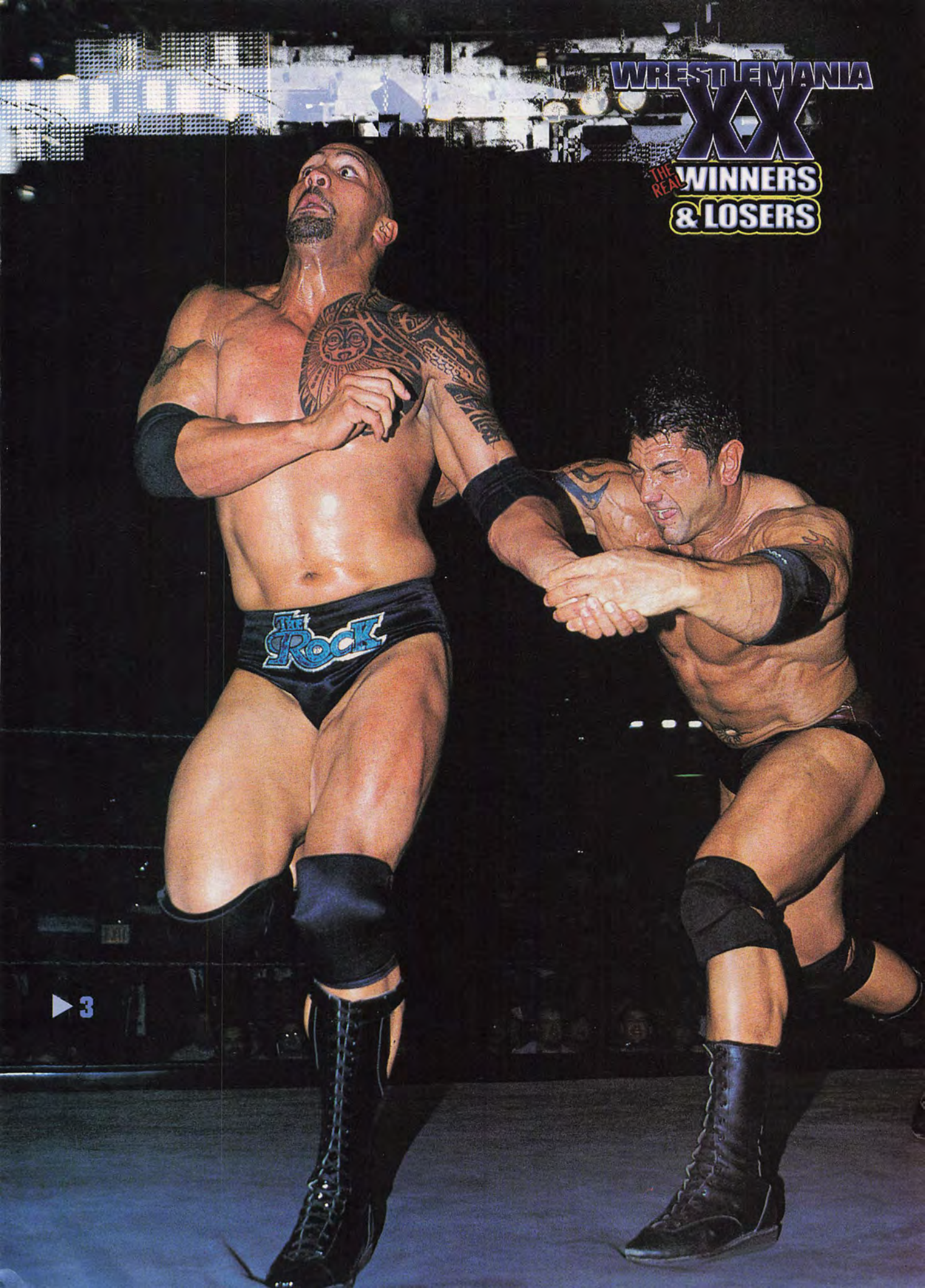




▶1—Flair makes the hardcore legend look not-so-hardcore at this moment
▶2—At least Foley has that T-shirt to protect him from a blistering Ric Flair chop!
▶3—It sure doesn't look like Batista is intimidated by the prospect of facing The Rock in his first WrestleMania match

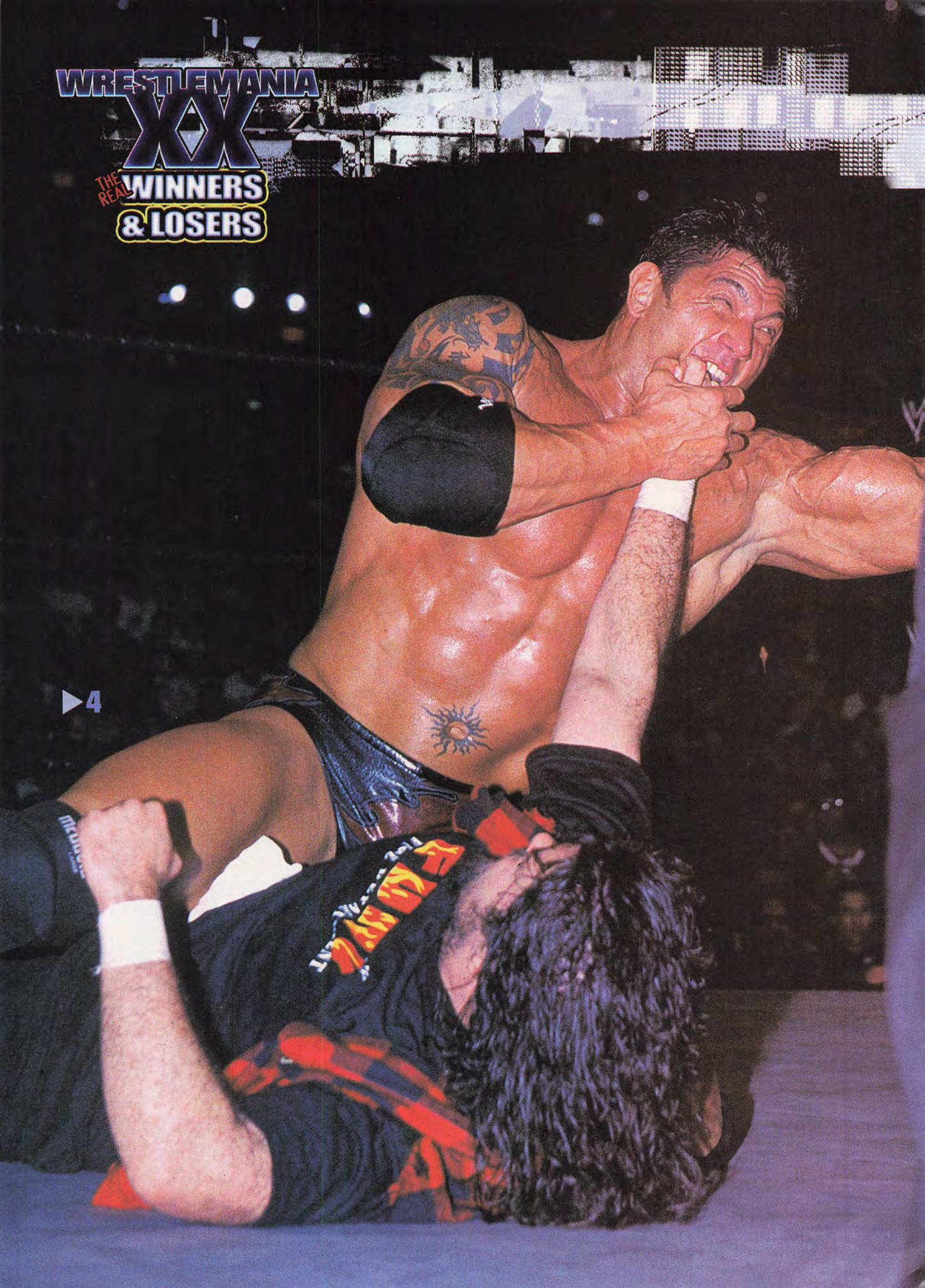
WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS



WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS



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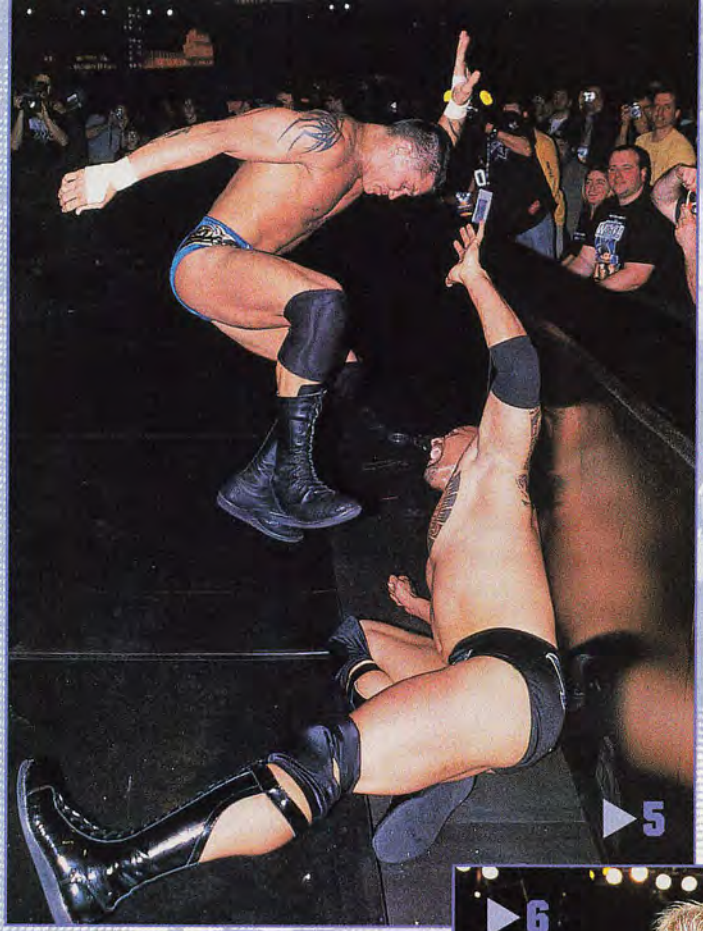


vent Flair from wielding a chair, Batista stormed into the ring and nearly broke Rock in half with a vicious sitout power bomb. Rock kicked out of the subsequent pin attempt and made a desperate tag to Foley, who attacked Orton with a double-armed DDT and then pulled out Mr. Socko to finish the match once and for all. But as Foley wound up, Orton struck with an RKO out of nowhere to earn the stunning one-two-three!

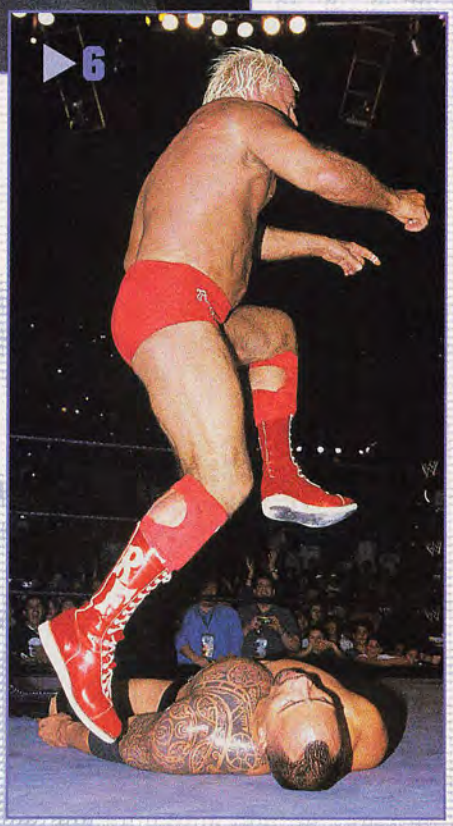
ACTION: B

SIGNIFICANCE: B+

THE WINNERS: Orton, Batista, and Flair when Orton pinned Foley at 16:58

THE REAL WINNERS: Orton and Batista, who showed no signs of being intimidated by Rock and Foley, two legendary wrestlers. They backed away occasionally, but only when it wasn't prudent for them to rush in like headstrong rookies. They wrestled smartly and wrestled well, which is why Evolution walked away from the match with the duke. Orton truly looked like a star.

THE REAL LOSER: Flair, who looked more ridiculous than anyone else wrestling on the WrestleMania card. His showboating—or, as he likes to call it, his stylin' and profilin'—was comical instead of effective, and it landed him in more precarious situations that he'd care to admit. Plus, his attempt at a people's elbow was truly the most ludicrous moment of the evening. Funny, but ridiculous.



TWO MORE WINNERS: Foley hadn't wrestled in four years, and The Rock hadn't wrestled since the previous year's Backlash, but neither man showed ring rust of any kind whatsoever. They hung in there with younger, hungrier opponents and outclassed the cagiest veteran of them all. Yeah, they lost the match, but it sure wasn't for lack of trying.

ANOTHER WINNER: Triple-H, who retired Foley and then got to sit in the back and watch as his protege, Orton, put the hardcore legend away.

ANOTHER LOSER: The Rock. For the first time since his departure for Hollywood, his appearance at this year's WrestleMania felt like he was coming in not because he loves the sport and missed the adulation of the crowd, but because he felt obligated to be there, and maybe because it would provide him with a nice paycheck. Maybe that's being a bit harsh, but for Rock to come in only for a matter of two weeks and take a WrestleMania paycheck—while other WWE regulars didn't make the card at all—doesn't seem fair.

▶ 4—Batista needs to realize that that mandible claw can be shoved down his gullet at any time
▶ 5—Another legend taken out (temporarily) by the "Legend Killer"
▶ 6—Even Vince McMahon's people's elbow never looked so ridiculous

THE MATCH: Torrie Wilson and Sable vs. Stacy Keibler and Jackie Gayda in a *Playboy* evening gown match

THE ACTION: Usually, tag team evening gown matches are decided when the female wrestlers on one team remove their opponents' evening gowns, but that's not the way this particular match went down. Prior to the bell, Sable grabbed the microphone and changed everything.

"Now, I know this is supposed to be an evening gown match, but quite frankly, I'm feeling a bit uncomfortable and a little restricted. So Torrie and I have decided that we would like to start this match with our gowns off."

Yippee!

After Sable, Torrie, and Stacy removed their gowns, the usually not-so-shy Miss Jackie developed second thoughts and attempted to walk away from the match. Sable brought her back in over the top rope and, along with Torrie, promptly removed Jackie's gown. Stacy, being a horrible teammate but a great friend to men everywhere, just stood there in her heels and watched this transpire.

Finally, with all four divas stripped to their lingerie, something akin to wrestling began to take place. Sable backed Jackie into the corner, hit her with a couple of kicks, and then tagged in Torrie, who leveled Jackie with a flying cross-bodyblock from the top rope. Jackie recovered enough to tag Stacy, who took a couple of turns maneuvering between the ring ropes before performing a cartwheel for no apparent reason. Torrie charged Stacy in the corner, but Stacy wrapped those long legs around Torrie's head and then choked her out with her foot a la Kevin Nash.

Then came Torrie and Stacy's mandatory roll-through segment. We give them credit: In spite of all the times we've seen it (and we've seen it in just about every match they've had), we still get a good laugh out of it.

Stacy tagged in Jackie following a failed pinfall attempt, but Jackie ran right into a Torrie Wilson spear at the two-minute mark. (Yes, we did say "a Torrie Wilson spear"!) The two women then began rolling around the ring, bringing back memories of old school ECW catfights. Jackie tried to wrap up Torrie from behind, but the crafty Miss Wilson rolled through the maneuver to gain the pinfall.

ACTION: D+

SIGNIFICANCE: D-

THE WINNERS: Torrie and Sable when Torrie pinned Jackie at 2:32

THE REAL WINNERS: Dawn Marie, Lita, and every other WWE diva who wasn't part of this fiasco.

THE REAL LOSER: The WWE women's division, which had its respectability damaged even though Sable, Torrie, Stacy, and Jackie aren't really a part of it.

ANOTHER LOSER: Jerry Lawler, who had to be absolutely irate that Smackdown's announce team of Tazz and Michael Cole got to call this match. Then again, he might have had a heart attack trying to handle this one.

YET ANOTHER LOSER: Miss Jackie. What were those things on her arms? Dead swans?

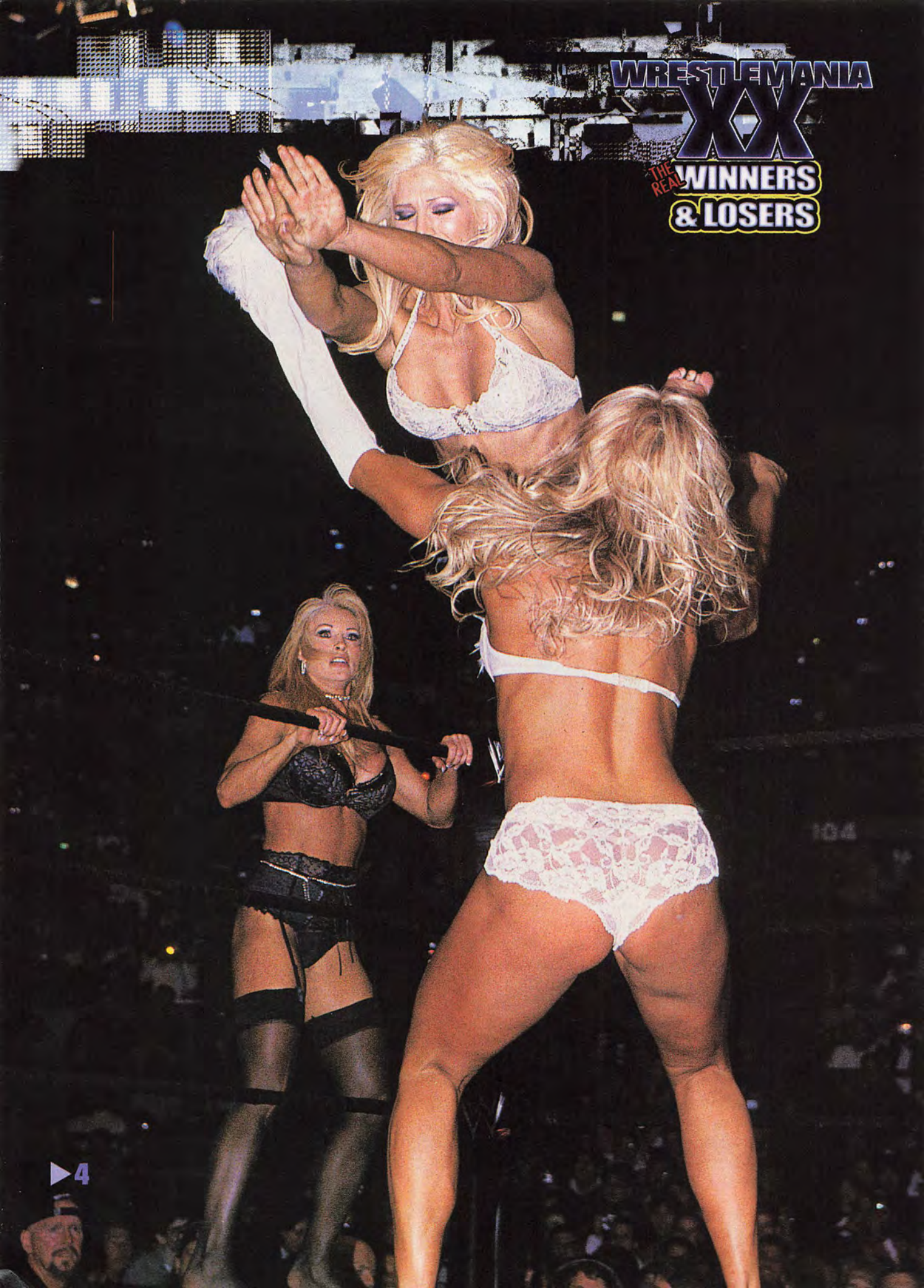
MAKE ROOM FOR ANOTHER LOSER: Kevin Nash, who has to be *really* upset that Stacy has stolen his "I'll trap my opponent in the corner while choking him out with my big boot" maneuver.

▶1—Whoever designed Jackie Gayda's gown might not want to be identified

▶2—So much for the conventional rules of an evening gown match!

▶3—Yes, there was some actual wrestling in this mercifully brief match ... sort of

▶4—Torrie's top-rope cross-body-block was actually fairly well-executed!


WRESTLEMANIA
XX
THE REAL WINNERS
& LOSERS

THE MATCH: The cruiserweight open

THE ACTION: First, the rules: Two wrestlers would start the match, and once a wrestler was eliminated, another wrestler would take his place. The last wrestler remaining would be the WWE cruiserweight champion.

Ultimo Dragon, who had serious issues making his way to the ring and then climbing the turnbuckles once he got there, started off the match against the freshly tattooed Shannon Moore. Moore and Dragon traded exchanges early, but Dragon secured the match's first pinfall with an over-the-head inverted DDT at 1:19. Jamie Noble entered the match next and blindsided Dragon with a shot to the back of the head, but Dragon responded with a series of swift kicks to Noble's torso. Noble locked in a front choke for the submission victory at 2:12.

Smackdown's number-one announcer, Funaki, was the next entrant, but he was almost immediately eliminated after Noble rolled through his attempt at a top-rope cross-bodyblock at 2:22. Less than two minutes later, Noble eliminated his cousin Nunzio via countout. Billy Kidman's top-rope shooting star press to the outside onto Noble and Nunzio was the match's must-see moment, but it wasn't until he employed his BK bomb (a top-rope sitout power bomb) on Noble that he got his first pinfall of the match. Rey Misterio Jr., dressed as The Flash, quickly eliminated Kidman and Tajiri to advance through the rest of the field to take on his arch-nemesis, cruiserweight champ Chavo Guerrero Jr. At 9:30, Misterio came off the top rope with a huracanrana, and then he scored with a senton over referee Charles Robinson *and* the top rope and onto Chavo Guerrero Sr. However, Senior recovered quickly enough to help Junior get the underhanded victory by holding his hands as he got the pin.

ACTION: C+

SIGNIFICANCE: D

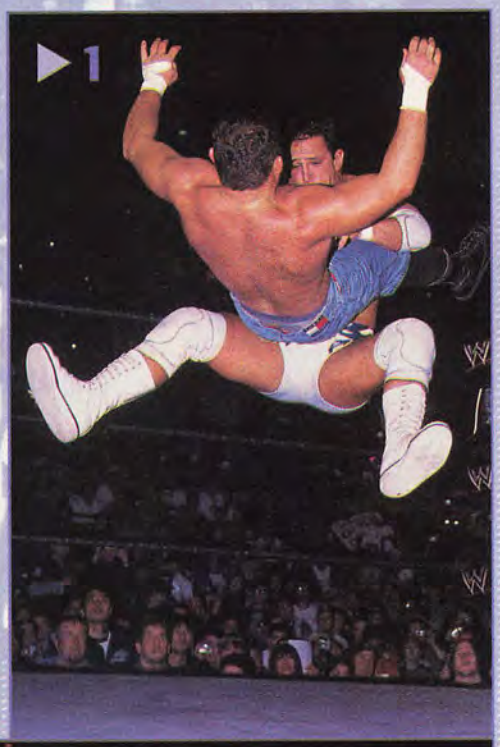
THE WINNER: Chavo Guerrero Jr. pinned Rey Misterio Jr. at 10:25 to retain the cruiserweight title.

THE REAL WINNER: Guerrero Sr., who probably earned himself a nice little WrestleMania paycheck for just over 10 minutes of work.

THE REAL LOSER: Can there be a bigger loser than Paul London? He was the only cruiserweight on the Smackdown roster not involved in the match (Akio was hit in the face with some Tajiri mist before he could actually wrestle), which is a tremendous slap in the face to such a skilled young star any way you look at it. Even Funaki laced up his boots for this one. *Funaki!*

ANOTHER WINNER: Brian "Spanky" Kendrick. If London's predicament is any sign, Kendrick got out while the getting was good. If London wasn't given a chance to participate in the biggest pay-per-view of the year, who's to say that Kendrick—London's former tag team partner—would have been?

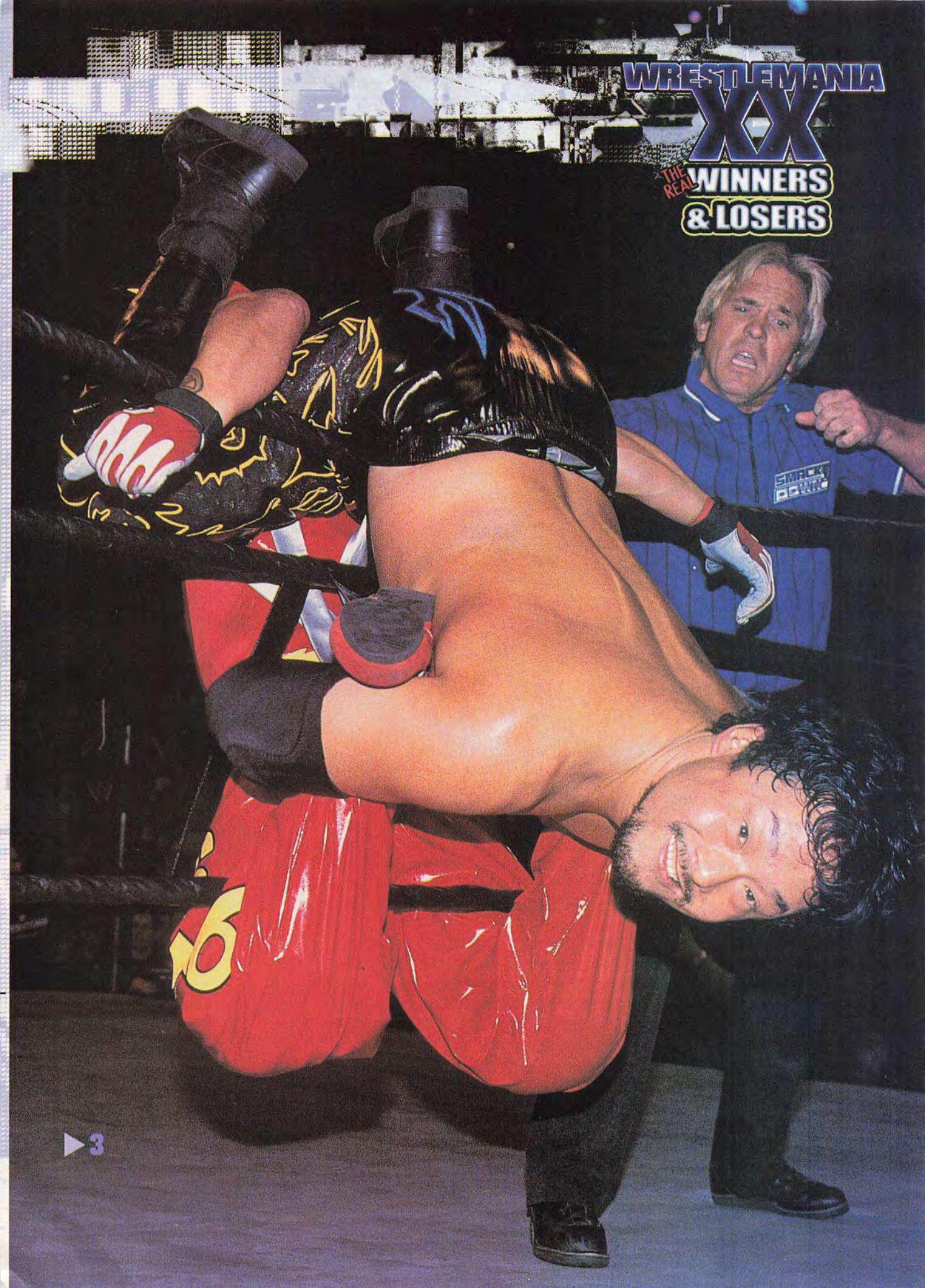
ANOTHER LOSER: Ultimo Dragon, who provided everyone with the best laugh-out-loud moment of the night when he slipped on the entranceway and just about face-planted on his way to the ring—and then nearly slipped off the turnbuckles as he ascended them to hail the crowd. Not exactly the WrestleMania/Madison Square Garden moment he was hoping for when he first signed with WWE, was it?



▶1—Billy Kidman provided a couple of highlight reel moments in the cruiser open, including a top-rope BK bomb to finish Jamie Noble
▶2—Chavo Jr. couldn't keep Rey Jr. down for the count until dear old Dad lent a helping hand or two later
▶3—Tajiri didn't last long in the gauntlet-style match, but he looked like he had fun!

WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS

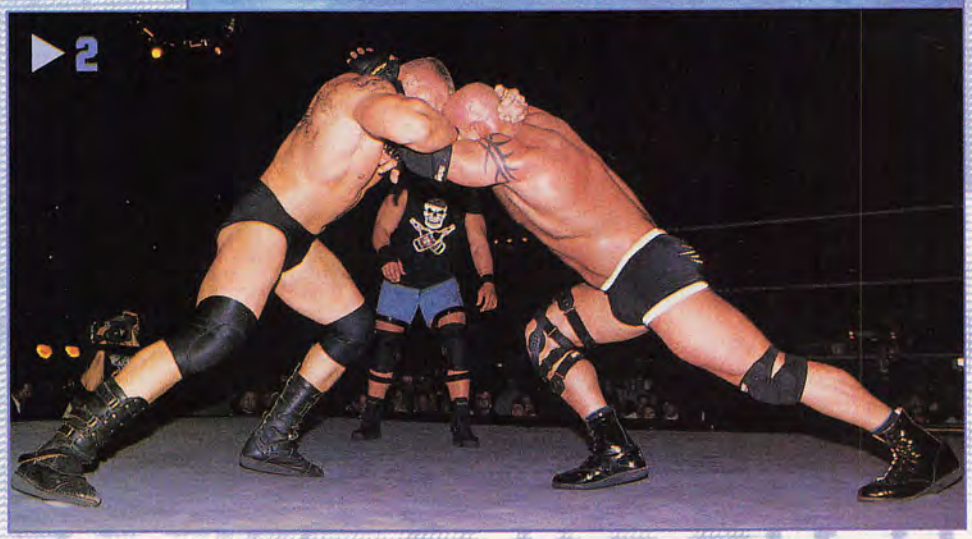


THE MATCH: Brock Lesnar vs. Bill Goldberg, with Steve Austin serving as special referee

THE ACTION: One week prior to WrestleMania XX, with word having already spread that Goldberg's last match with WWE would be his WrestleMania match with Lesnar, news broke that Lesnar had given notice to Vince McMahon that the match with Goldberg would be *his* last in WWE as well. Lesnar cited the promotion's rigorous touring schedule and a desire to try to play in the NFL as his main incentives for leaving.

Reaction to Lesnar's decision varied. Some insiders believed he was doing right by himself by getting out on his terms, while others believed that he should have hung around for a couple of months to help WWE ease into his departure. Either way, reaction to Lesnar's decision wasn't all that passionate.

Until his entrance music cued up at WrestleMania, anyway. From the second Lesnar strode out onto the entranceway, the boos he heard from a crowd that was once partisan to him were deafening. Once he climbed into the ring, fans started giving him single-finger salutes. Eventually, chants of "You sold out!" and "Hey, hey, hey, goodbye!" started raining down.



While Goldberg did his best to hide in the corner, Lesnar stood in the ring dumbfound, seemingly paralyzed with disbelief. He stared at Goldberg, then at the crowd while the Madison Square Garden faithful poured it on. An entire minute went by without even a collar-and-elbow tie-up. Then two minutes. Lesnar, for the first time in his WWE career, was afraid to act. Goldberg looked to Austin for guidance, but "Stone-Cold" was off his game, too. He just stood there smirking.

At 2:45, Goldberg and Lesnar locked up. At 3:15, after 45 seconds spent pushing each other back and forth, they disengaged, with neither man having even attempted so much as a punch. Then they locked up again … and disengaged again. Four minutes and 30 seconds into the match and we still hadn't seen even the simplest offensive move. They spent the fifth minute running at each other. At 5:50, they collided in mid-ring and knocked each other down. On came the "Bor-ing!" chants.

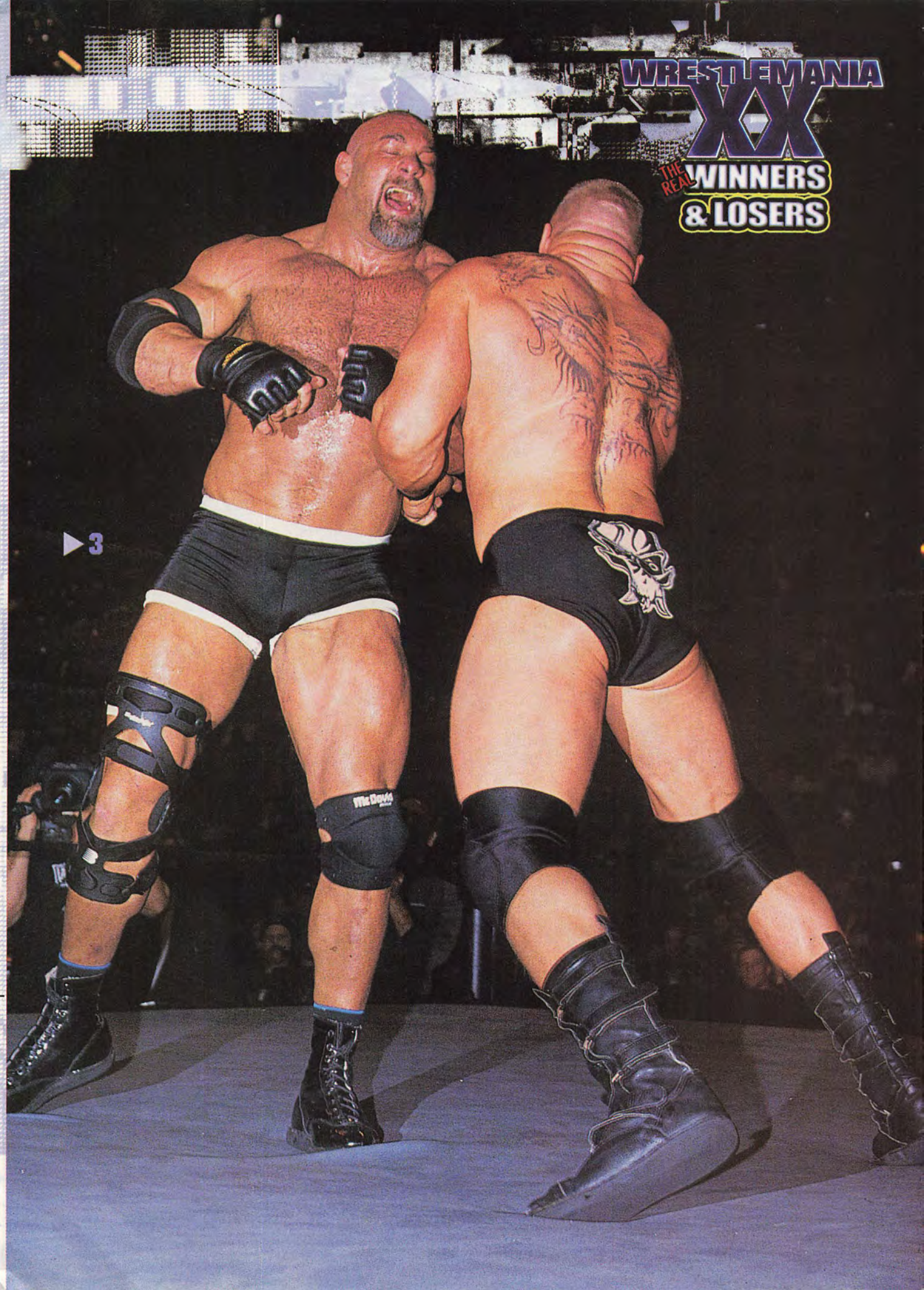
This wasn't going well.

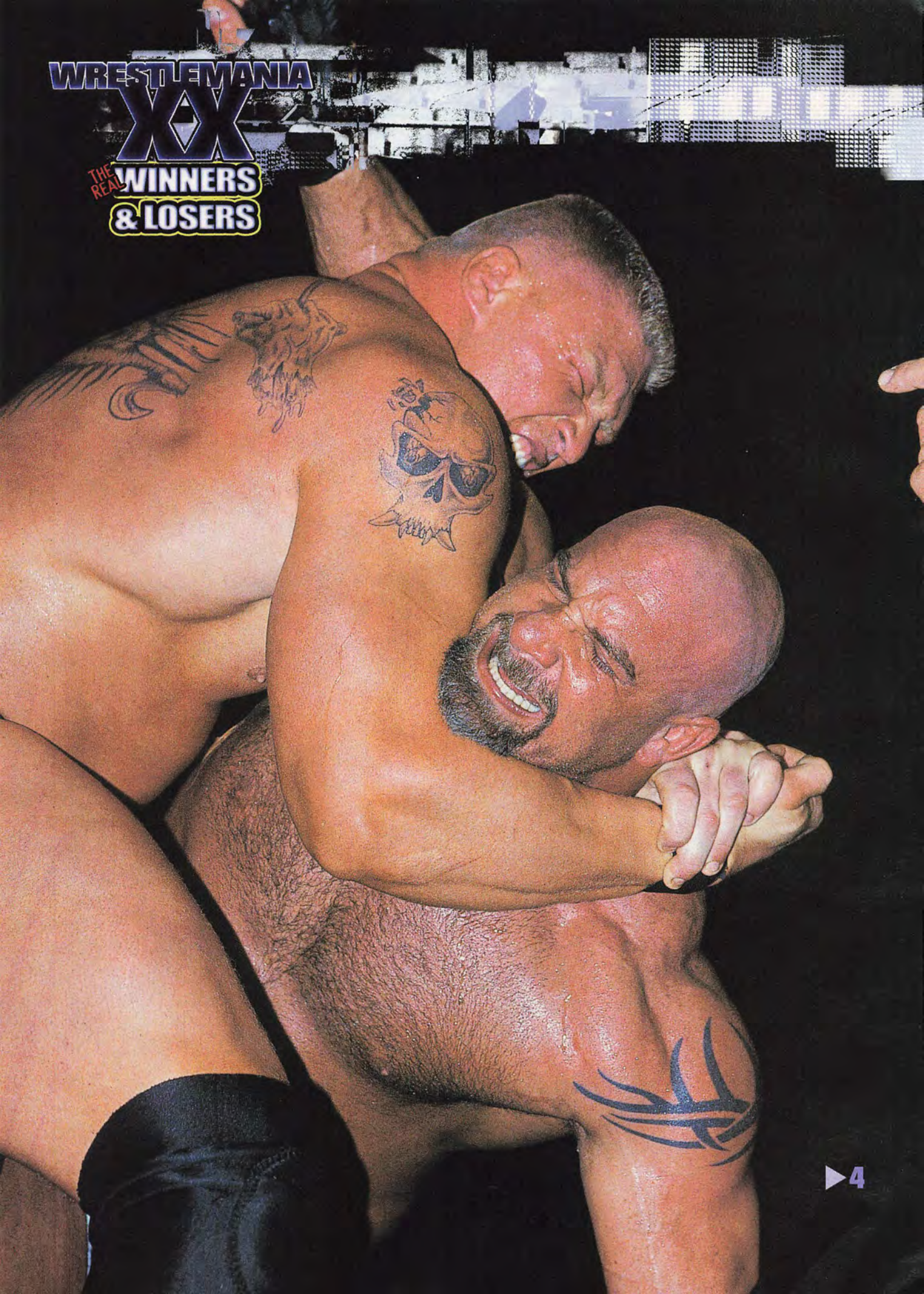
Finally, at 6:42, something resembling a match began. Lesnar backed Goldberg into the corner with a series of kicks to the midsection. Goldberg responded by military-pressing Lesnar high into the air before dropping him back onto the mat with a modified jackhammer. He tried to finish Lesnar off at 7:17 with a spear, but Lesnar dodged the maneuver and Goldberg

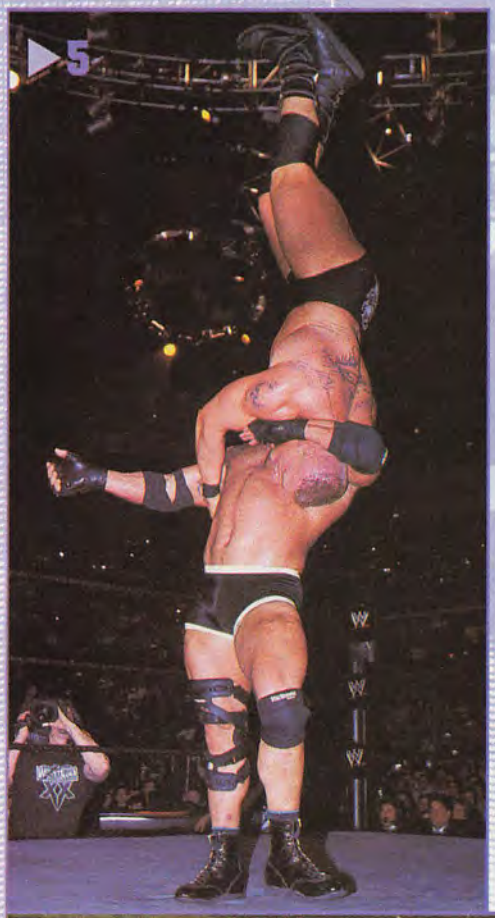
▶ 1—Austin called the match fairly, but what must he have been thinking?
▶ 2—It took forever just to get to a collar-and-elbow tie-up, and this wasn't a patient crowd!
▶ 3—Just a surreal match, between not one but two men who were leaving afterward

WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS




WRESTLEMANIA
XX
THE REAL WINNERS
& LOSERS



smashed his shoulder into the steel ringpost.

Lesnar worked over Goldberg's injured shoulder for the next couple of minutes, but nothing he did slowed "Da Man" for long. At 11:39, Goldberg regained some of his wind and began leveling Lesnar with short clotheslines. At 12:00 exactly, he connected with a spear, but Lesnar kicked out at two. Goldberg confronted Austin about a slow count, allowing Lesnar to set Goldberg up for a surprise F5. Lesnar, though, took a couple of seconds to cover Goldberg, and that cost him. Goldberg kicked out just before three, leading Lesnar to question Austin's officiating.

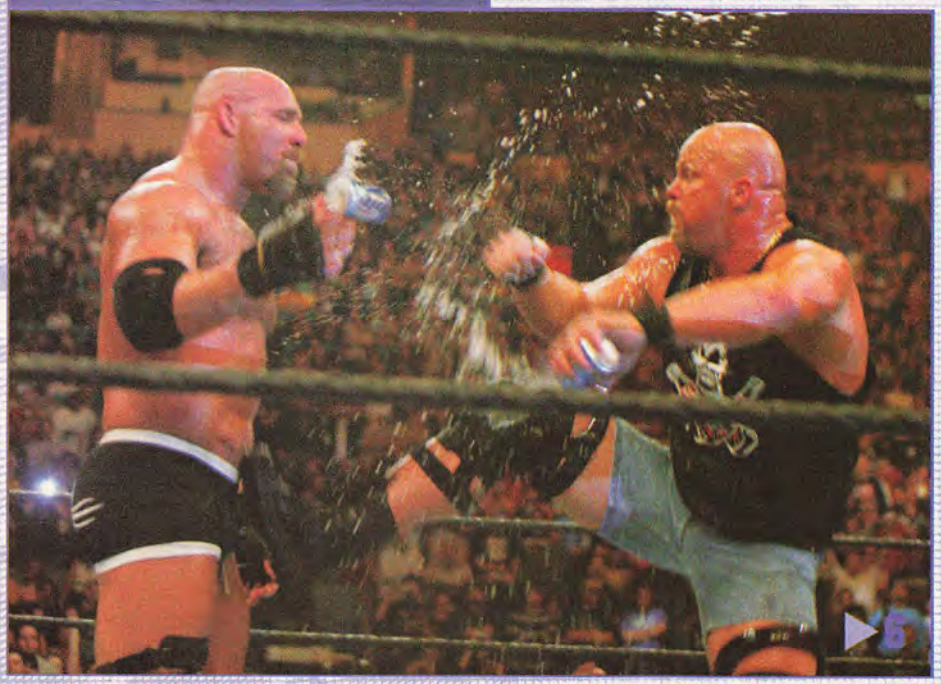
Lesnar tried for a spear at 13:15, but Goldberg dodged the move he made famous and gave Lesnar one of his own. One jackhammer later, Goldberg had taken home the surprising pinfall victory.

ACTION: C-

SIGNIFICANCE: A

THE WINNER: Goldberg pinned Lesnar at 13:40

THE REAL WINNER: The Internet, the power of which was on display throughout the match. The reception the MSG crowd gave Lesnar was right on par with the negative reaction The Rock received for his WrestleMania X8 match with Hulk Hogan, but this one was slightly more meaningful. The reaction Rock received at X8, while surreal, was expected because of the way fans had treated him during prior appearances. The news of Lesnar's imminent departure had only been out about a week—and only on the Internet and a few sports shows—yet somehow an entire arena full of people knew enough about the situation to boo him mercilessly. In fact, the boos were so loud and the chants so overwhelming that Jim Ross had to address Lesnar's imminent departure during the match so that those fans who were unaware of the situation wouldn't be completely confounded by what they were watching.



ANOTHER WINNER: Goldberg, who got to fly under the radar during this match. Had Lesnar not made the decision to leave, fans probably would have targeted Goldberg with their ire. As it was, Goldberg got to shine in his last WWE match, even if Austin did upstage him in the end.

AND ANOTHER WINNER: Austin, who got to send home two athletes who wrestled for the love of money instead of the love of the sport with stunners. No wonder he's the sport's top ambassador.

THE REAL LOSER: Lesnar, who will probably return one day and find an irate fan base waiting for him when he does.

ANOTHER LOSER: Again Lesnar, who probably missed his only opportunity to play professional football in the United States when the XFL folded a few years ago.

YET ANOTHER WINNER: The Arena Football League. (Maybe we made that crack about the XFL too soon.)

▶ 4—Definitely a clash of the titans!
▶ 5—A jackhammer sent Lesnar back home a loser ...
▶ 6—And Goldberg had a stunner to eat before he left!

THE MATCH: Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas vs. The Basham Brothers vs. The APA vs. Rikishi & Scotty Too Hotty in a fatal four-way match for the Smackdown tag team title

THE ACTION: Benjamin and Bradshaw started the match off by trading blows in the center of the ring. Bradshaw gained the early advantage, but Doug Basham smartly tagged Bradshaw so that he and his brother would have a shot at a pinfall attempt. Benjamin, though, knew he had to get out of the ring, so he tagged in Haas and the match continued.

When Scotty Too Hotty tagged in, he immediately began showboating, but his opponent, Haas, wasn't in the mood. He threw Scotty over the top rope, and when Scotty skinned the cat to make his way back in, Haas caught him and extended his frame outward from the top rope so that Benjamin could leapfrog Haas and drive all his weight across the small of Scotty's back.

At 4:28, Scotty tagged in Rikishi to bring him into the match for the first time. The big man quickly cleared the ring of the Bashams, Haas, Benjamin, Faarooq, and even Bradshaw, and then at 4:45 hit a DDT on Danny Basham for a one-count before Faarooq broke it up. At 5:16, he introduced Haas to the stinkface, a move that surprisingly still gets a decent pop out of the audience after all these years. Not long after that, the match degenerated into a brawl, with referee Nick Patrick scrambling to maintain control. Rikishi planted Bradshaw to the mat with a Samoan drop, then he walked over to Danny Basham and sat on him for the pinfall victory.

ACTION: C

SIGNIFICANCE: C-

THE WINNERS: Rikishi and Scott Too Hotty, when Rikishi pinned Danny Basham at 6:03 to retain the Smackdown tag team title

THE REAL WINNERS: The eight men who participated in the Raw fatal four-way tag match earlier in the evening. The crowd, having just come off the high of booing Brock Lesnar and then cheering as Steve Austin stunned both Lesnar and Bill Goldberg, had no energy for this match. For that reason alone, their match came off much better than this one.

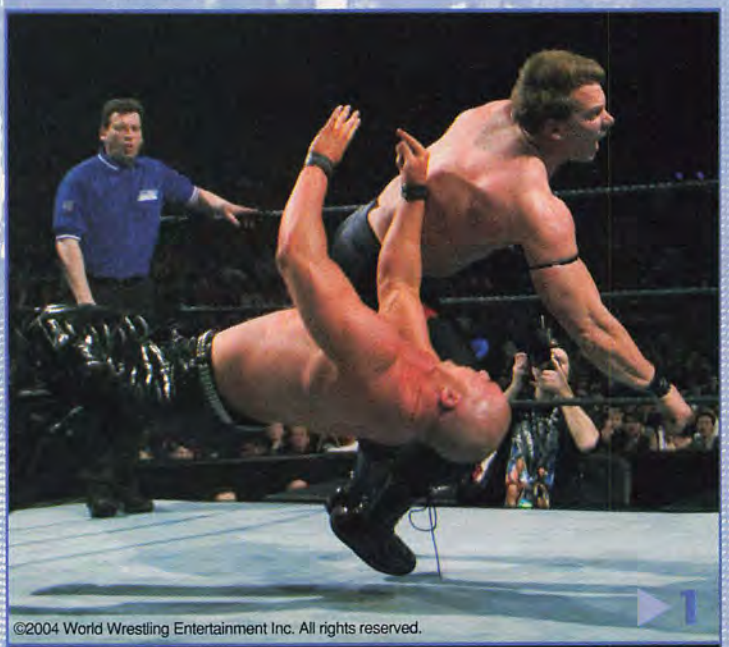
THE REAL LOSER: Faarooq, who never officially tagged into the match and then was fired two days later at the *Smackdown* tapings

ANOTHER LOSER: The Smackdown tag team division, which probably could have used new champions. Rikishi and Scotty are entertaining, but their title reign feels like a throwback to another era.

ANOTHER WINNER: John Cena, who can always be referred to as the cool hip-hop guy as long as Scotty Too Hotty—the geeky hip-hop guy—is around.

TWO MORE LOSERS: Chuck Palumbo and Johnny Stamboli, who were no doubt trying to come up with a ring configuration that would allow for a fifth team to enter this match.

TWO MORE WINNERS: Michael Cole and Tazz, who made this match feel important despite everything we've just written.



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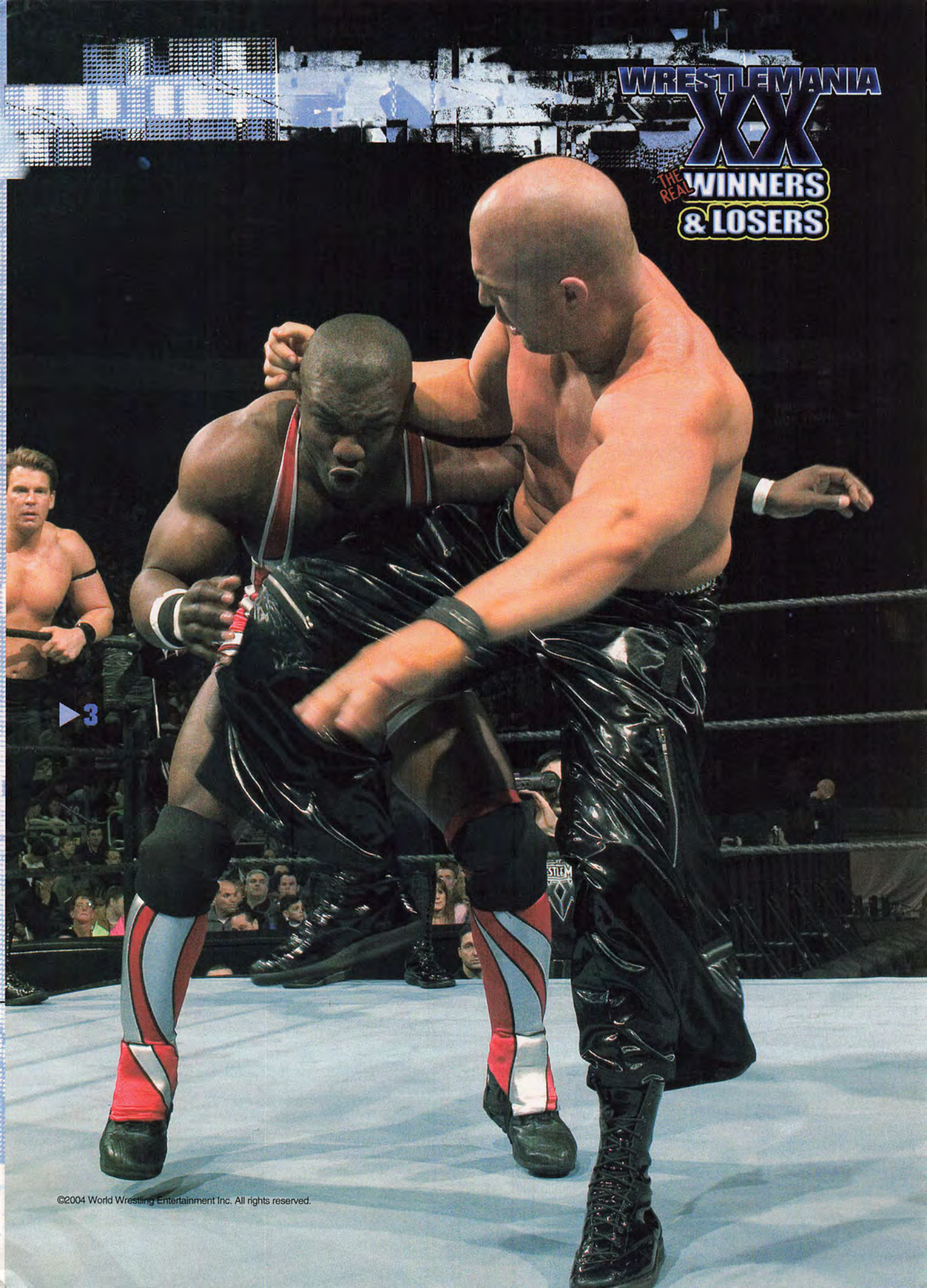
▶ 1—Gotta try to avoid that clothesline from hell at all costs.
▶ 2—Scotty Too Hotty works a headlock on Charlie Haas, wearing him down for his portly partner.
▶ 3—A knee to the stomach from Danny Basham has Shelton Benjamin wobbling just a bit.



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THE MATCH: Victoria vs. Molly Holly in a hair vs. title match for the WWE women's title

THE ACTION: The stipulations of this match were simple: If Molly won, she would regain the WWE women's championship. If Victoria won, Molly would have her head shaved.

Easy enough.

Molly and Victoria began the match using rudimentary punches and kicks, with the much smaller Molly acting as the aggressor. Victoria had almost no offense during the first minute or so, but she surprised Molly with a rollup that earned her a one-count.

Molly smartly rolled out of the ring to remove herself from danger and to recover. When Victoria came rushing out of the ring to chase her, Molly dropped her with a clothesline, threw her back into the ring, and took her over with a snap suplex for a two-count. She followed up the pinfall attempt with two well-placed elbows into Victoria's kidneys and a forward kick directly into her face. At 2:10, she locked Victoria into a painful neck vice, and you could hear the defending women's champion screaming out in agony. Molly held on to the submission hold for nearly a full minute before yanking Victoria down to the mat by her luxurious raven-colored locks.

The hair-pulling woke Victoria up, because she immediately went on the offensive. First, she kicked Molly in the head, and then she hooked her into a pinning predicament for a two-count. When both women got back to their feet, she used a series of overhand rights to keep Molly on the defensive. At 3:30, she took Molly over with a powerslam. Molly recovered enough to trip Victoria up and send her neck-first into the ropes, and she even managed to powerbomb Victoria from the second rope, but Victoria remained largely unscathed. Molly thought she had the match won when she positioned Victoria for the widow's peak, but Victoria countered the maneuver and took Molly over with a backslide for the winning pinfall. Shortly thereafter, Molly was as bald as "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin.

ACTION: B

SIGNIFICANCE: B

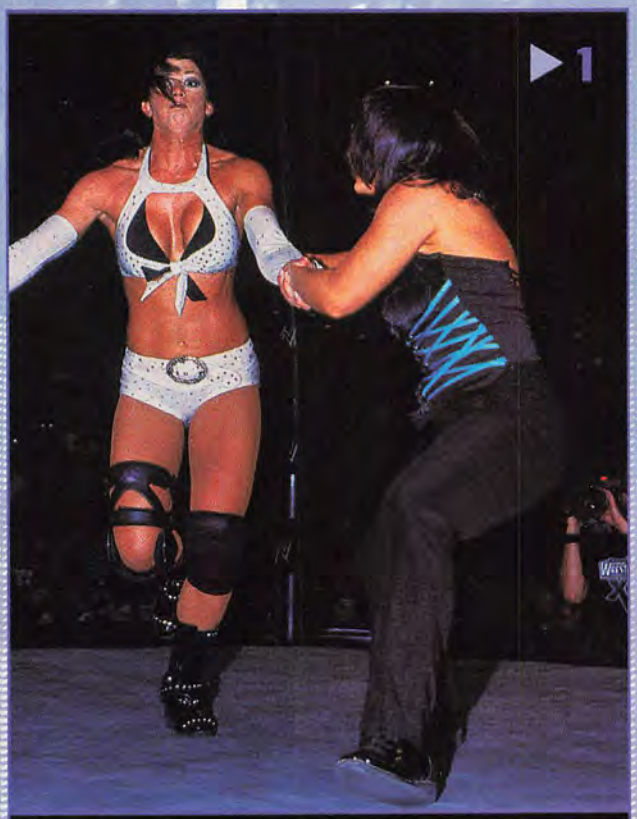
THE WINNER: Victoria pinned Molly at 4:53 to retain her title

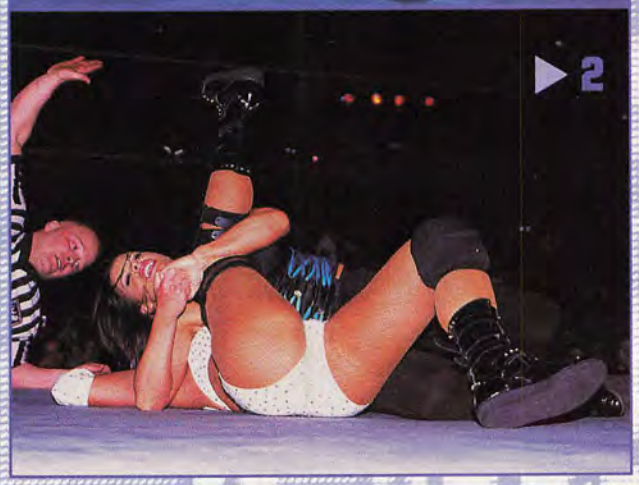
THE REAL WINNER: Singer Sinead O'Connor, who can now secretly participate in WWE matches if she so desires.

THE REAL LOSER: Kevin Nash. Remember when he lost that hair vs. hair match to Chris Jericho on the August 18, 2003, edition of *Raw?* Remember how he only got a short trim? Remember how pathetic we all thought it was at the time? Now think about how Molly looked after this match was over. If the payoff for Nash's loss in that hair vs. hair match seemed pathetic before, how much more pathetic does it seem now?

ANOTHER WINNER: Molly. Let's face it, not every WWE diva would put her hair on the line for a chance at a title. Molly did, and the fact that she lost shouldn't take away from that. She's one dedicated diva. Someday, she's going to turn fan favorite, and we think people will really appreciate and get behind her.

MORE LOSERS: The rest of the WWE divas in the women's division, who will now have to try to figure out how to beat Molly with one of their favorite weapons removed from their arsenals: hair-pulling!

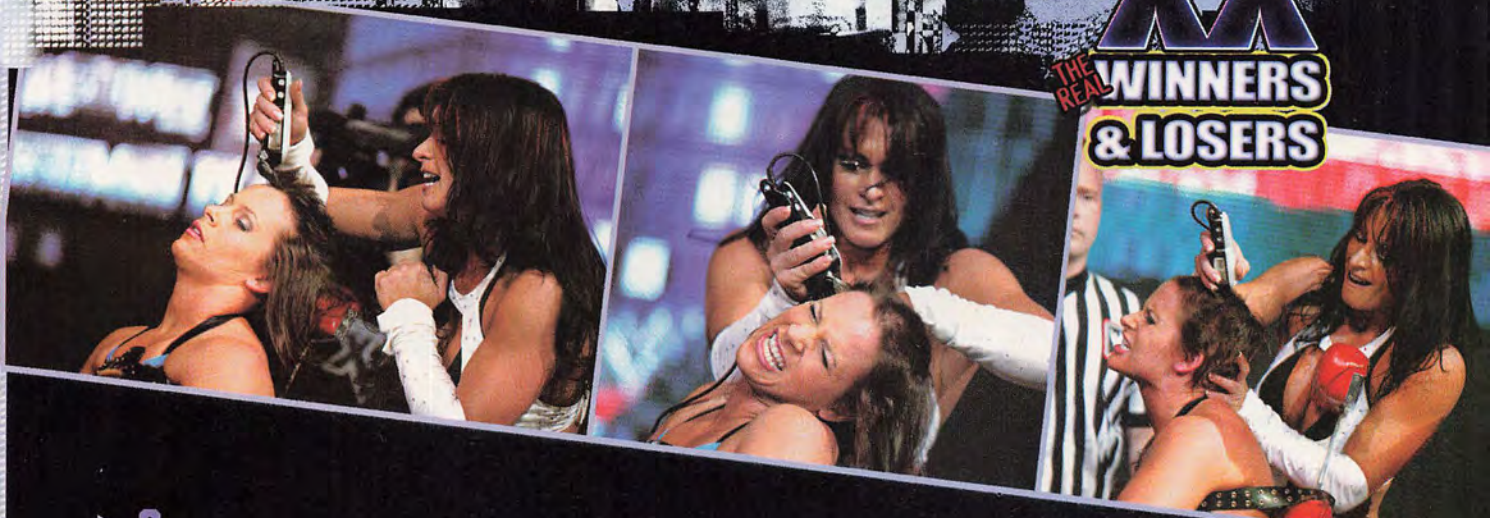


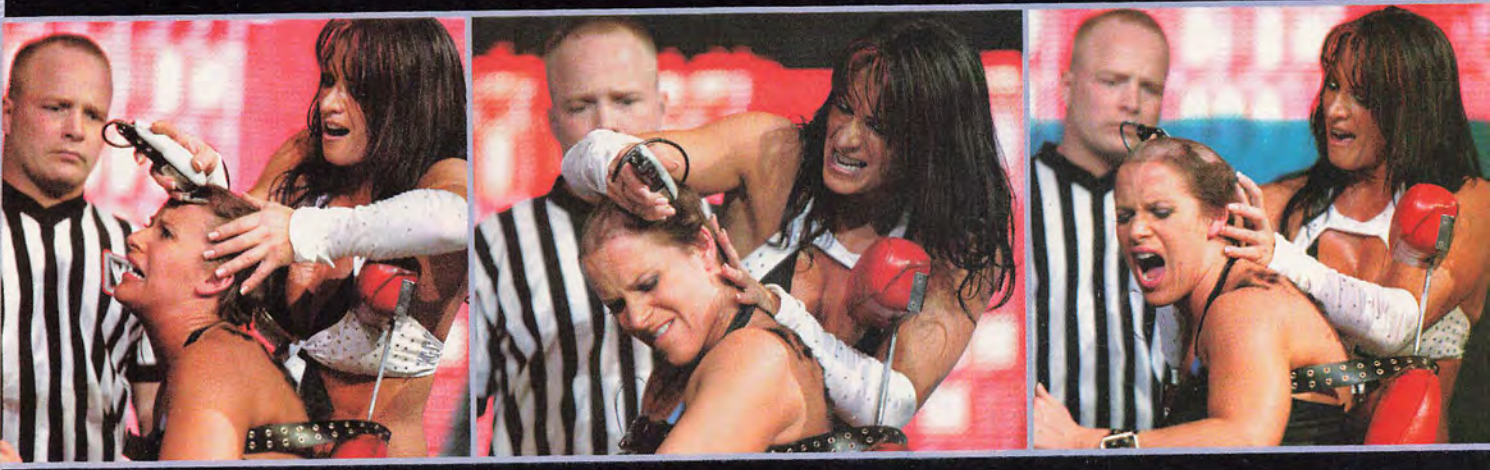


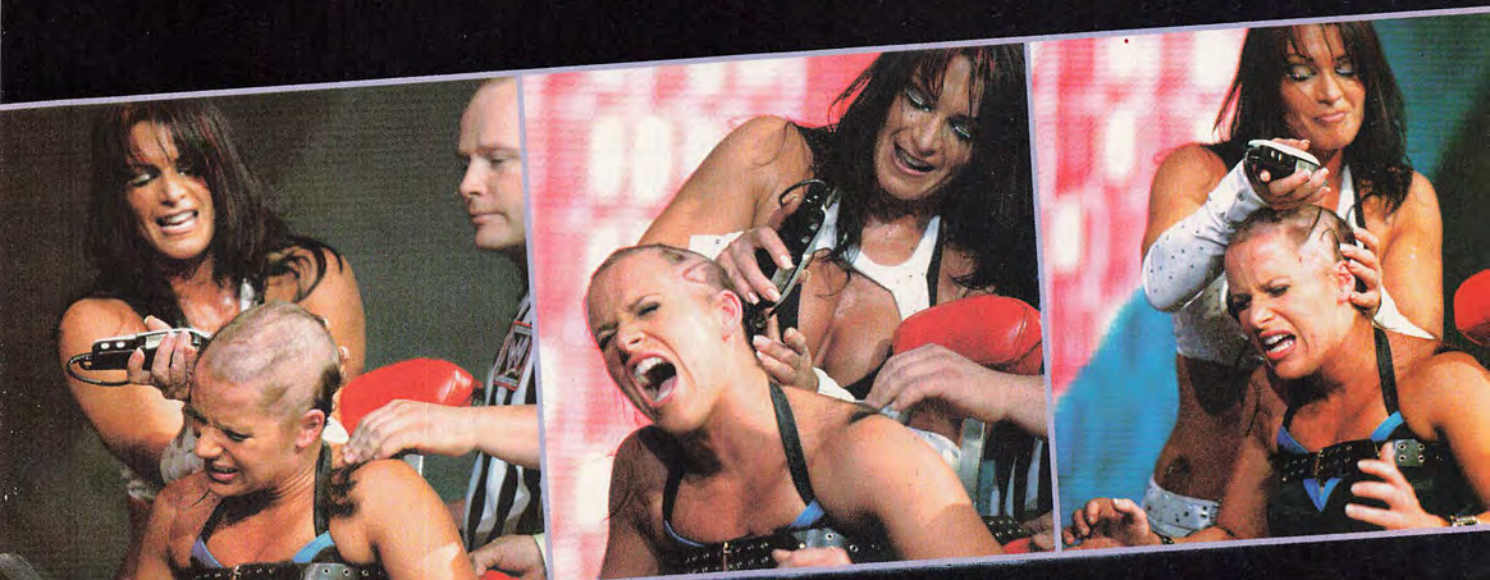
▶1—Everything looks good so far for Molly. No reason to be worried ...
▶2—So close to reclaiming the gold and avoiding such utter humiliation!
▶3—Poor, poor, helpless Molly. This is no Kevin Nash haircut.

WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS





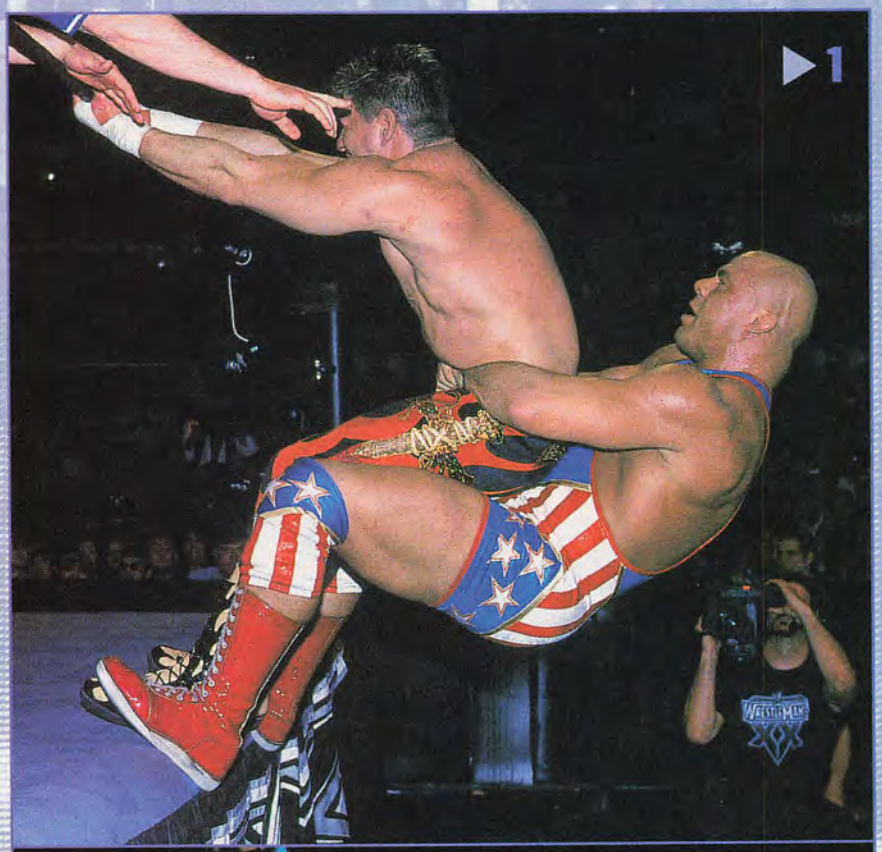


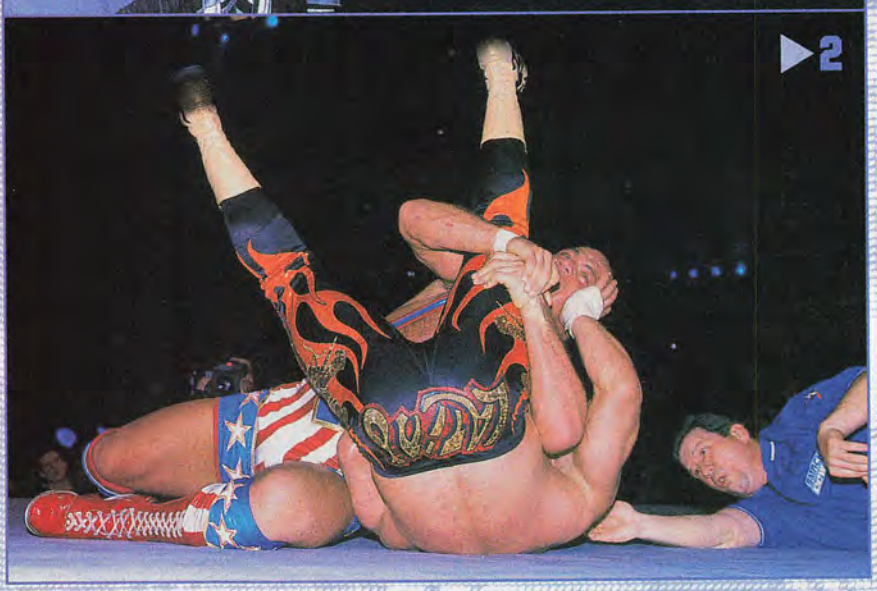
THE MATCH: Eddie Guerrero vs. Kurt Angle for the Smackdown championship

THE ACTION: Guerrero and Angle both looked like they were doing everything they could to avoid making a crucial mistake during the match's opening minutes. The pace remained slow until the 3:30 mark, when Guerrero sent Angle tumbling to the mat with three successive shoulder-blocks. Angle rolled to the outside to catch his breath and put a stop to Guerrero's momentum, and Guerrero made the mistake of not pursuing him. When Angle re-entered the ring, he immediately took Guerrero down with a front facelock.

One of the scariest moments of the night for Guerrero came when Angle attempted to back suplex him off the ring apron and onto the concrete floor below. Fortunately, Guerrero's grip on the ropes was strong enough that he could block the maneuver and remain on the apron.

The wrestlers continued their tentative approach until 9:03, when Guerrero ascended to the top rope and attempted to waylay Angle—who was outside on the floor—with a double axhandle. Angle ducked the maneuver, and Guerrero's ribs crunched into the steel protective barrier. The Olympian rolled Guerrero into the ring and attempted a pinfall at that point. When the champion kicked out, Angle picked Guerrero up and then drove him down rib-first into his knee. At 10:05, he applied a grapevine. At 11:05, he tossed Guerrero with a pair of belly-to-belly overhead release suplexes, and "Latino Heat" began to show signs of limited mobility.



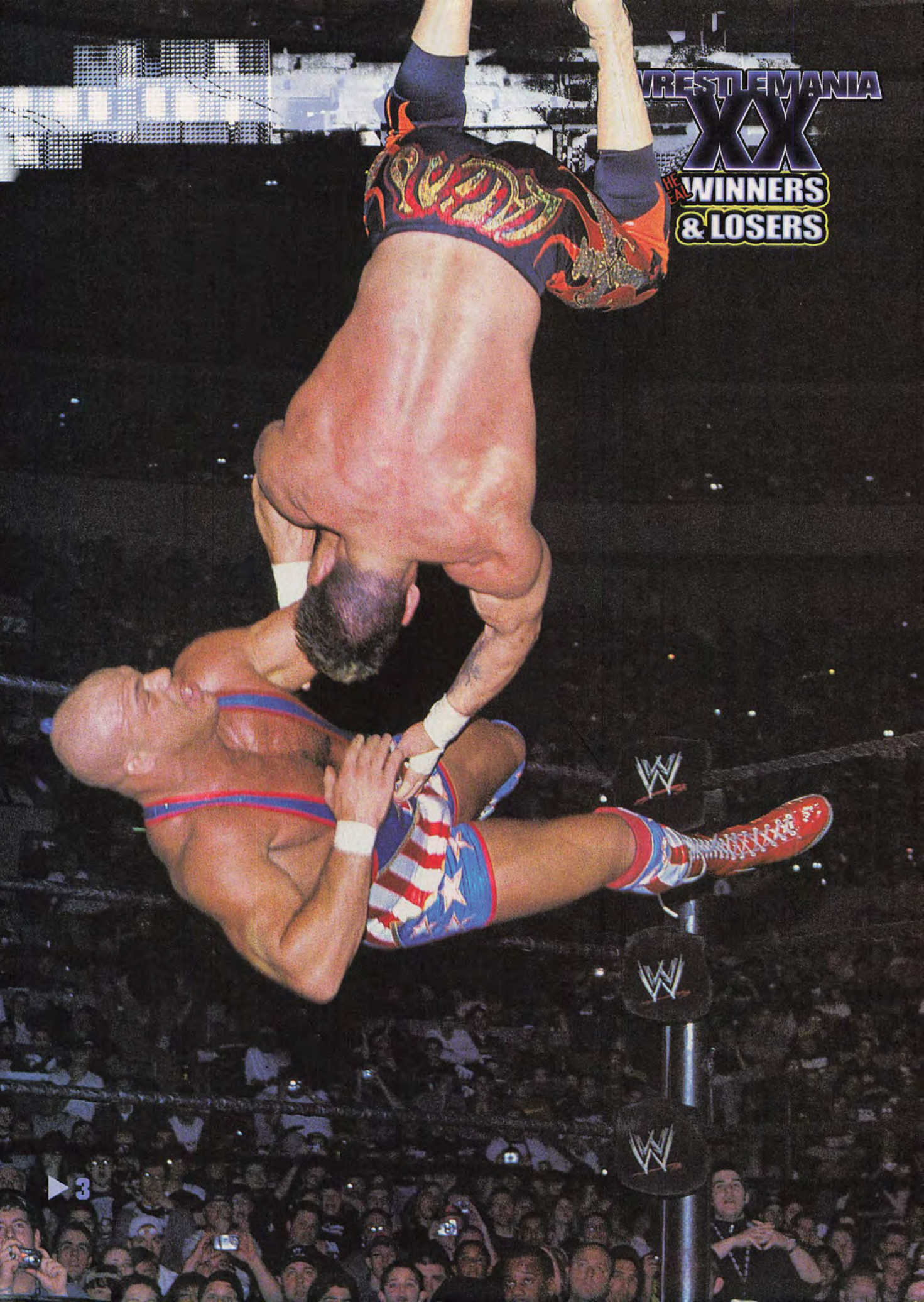


The Smackdown champion made a bit of a tactical error when, after blocking a top-rope suplex by Angle and headbutting him back down to the mat, he went for the frog splash. It was too soon—and Angle rolled out of its path.

But Guerrero kept fighting. He shrugged off the punches Angle threw at him and regained his momentum around the 15-minute mark. The champ got a two-count following a belly-to-back suplex at 15:15, and at 16:41, he nailed Angle with two rolling vertical suplexes. At 19:10, Guerrero thought he had the match won after hitting a frog splash, but Angle kicked out just before the count of three. Eddie seemed shocked that his signature finisher was not enough to end the match.

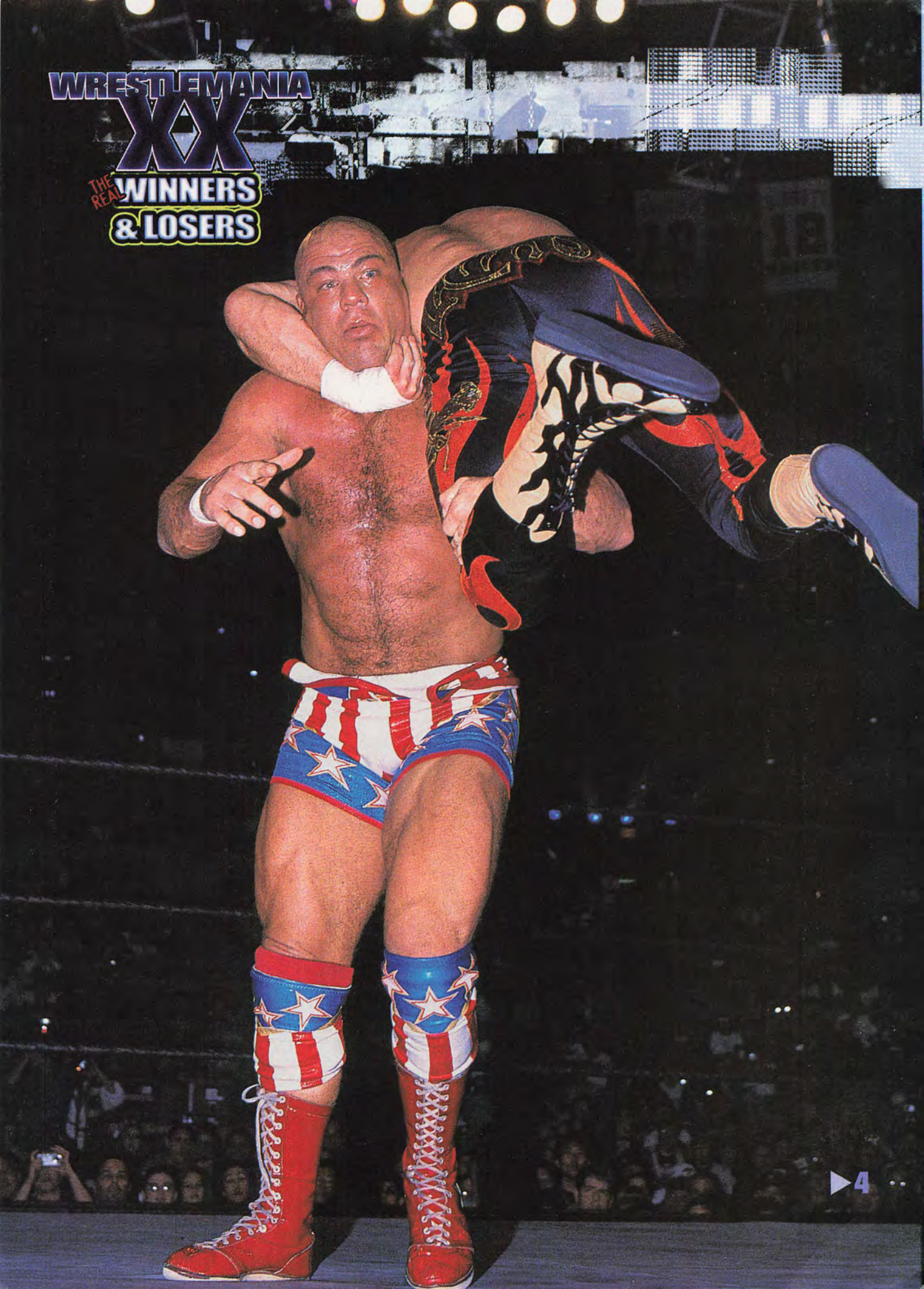
The match seemed over a second time when Angle summoned the strength to apply his anklelock finisher about a minute later, and Guerrero,

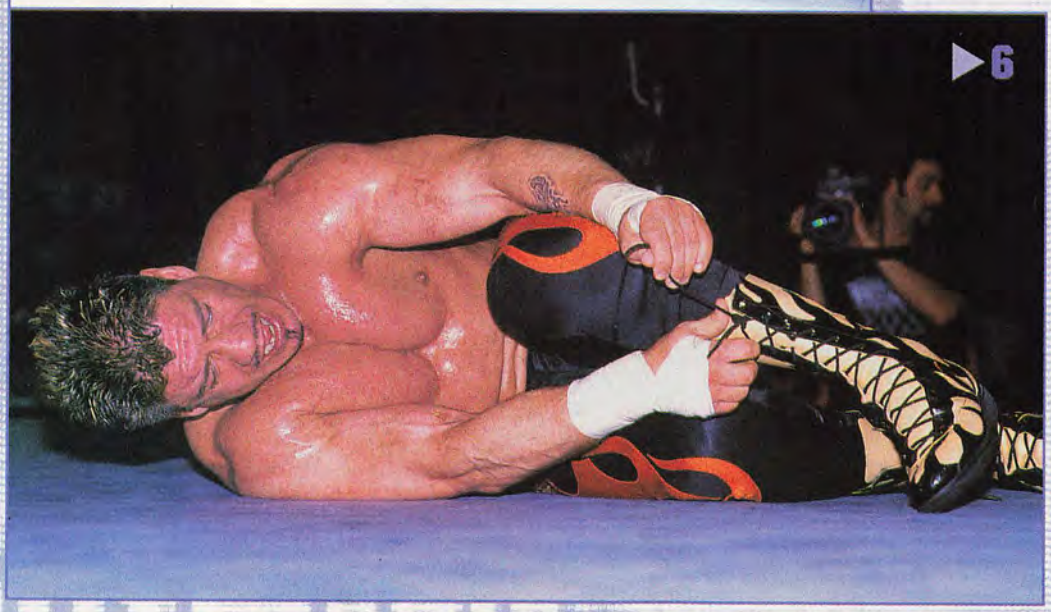
▶1—If Guerrero hadn't blocked this back suplex off the ring apron, he would have been in a heap of trouble!
▶2—A two-count that almost became a three-count for Angle!
▶3—The action gets closer to the fans in the blue seats.



WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS


WRESTLEMANIA
XX
THE REAL WINNERS
& LOSERS



after failing to reach the ropes to force a break of the hold, finally countered by pushing Angle out of the ring with his legs. As Angle lay on the outside catching a brief breather, Guerrero began frantically untying his bootstraps to release the pressure from his swelling ankle. Or at least that's what he *seemed* to be doing. Angle was determined to end the match when he re-entered the ring and immediately reapplied the anklelock. When he did, the loosened boot slipped off Guerrero's foot and into Angle's hands, allowing "Latino Heat" to wrap up a surprised Angle for the win. Although their feet briefly got tangled in the ropes, the referee didn't notice, and Angle didn't protest that fact after the three-count was made.

ACTION: A-

SIGNIFICANCE: A-

THE WINNER: Guerrero pinned Angle at 21:32 to retain the Smackdown title

THE REAL WINNER: WWE's new style, which was highlighted during the Angle-Guerrero match. There were only a few high-impact moves and plenty of mat-based holds and submission techniques employed during the 21-minute match, and the crowd received it well for the most part. Granted, not every pair of WWE wrestlers could pull of such a scientific match, and not every WWE crowd would be so receptive, but WWE wrestlers are doing a nice job of making the new style work for them. That should really help to cut down on the number of injuries.

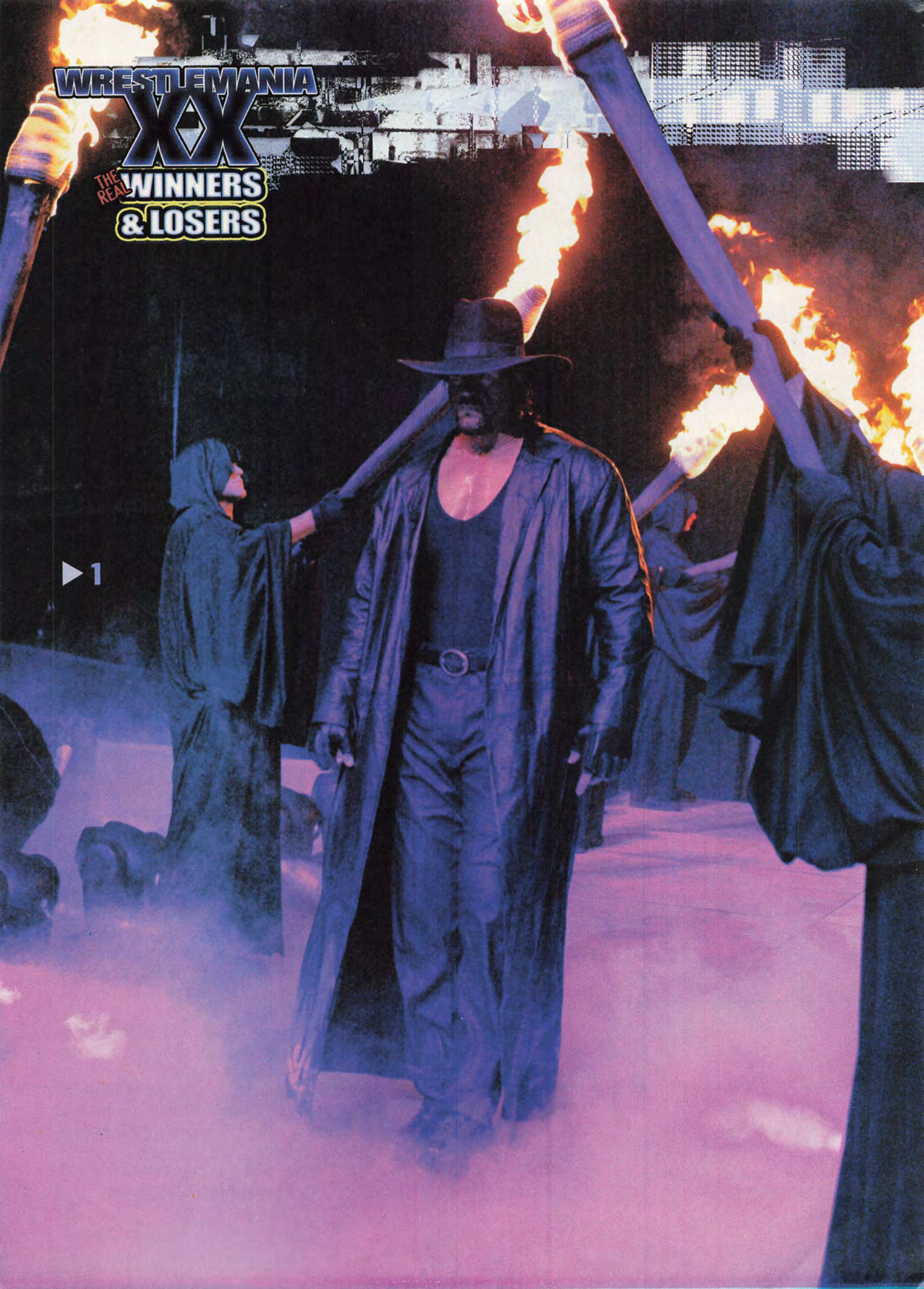
THE REAL LOSER: Angle, who began experiencing numbness in his extremities after the match. Although reports said that he'd be able to start wrestling again in April, Angle's health has become problematic for WWE. It's getting hard for the promotion to depend much on him as a wrestler. That's why he was named Smackdown GM nine days after 'Mania.

THE REAL WINNER: Guerrero, who can now say that he walked away from WrestleMania XX—the most hyped WrestleMania of all-time—with his Smackdown championship belt still strapped around his waist.

ANOTHER WINNER: Chavo Guerrero Jr., whose close losses to Eddie in recent months don't look so bad now. He was losing to the man who has become the number-one wrestler on the Smackdown side of WWE. And he figures to get more title shots in the future.

TWO MORE LOSERS: Guerrero and Angle, who had to play third fiddle to Kane vs. Undertaker and Triple-H vs. Shawn Michaels vs. Chris Benoit.

▶4—Looks like Kurt is about to end up on the receiving end of a very painful DDT.
▶5—He just can't believe a perfectly executed frog splash wasn't enough to put away Angle.
▶6—Loosening the boot, but not for the reason everyone thinks ...


WRESTLEMANIA
XX
THE REAL WINNERS
& LOSERS
▶1

THE MATCH: Kane vs. The Undertaker

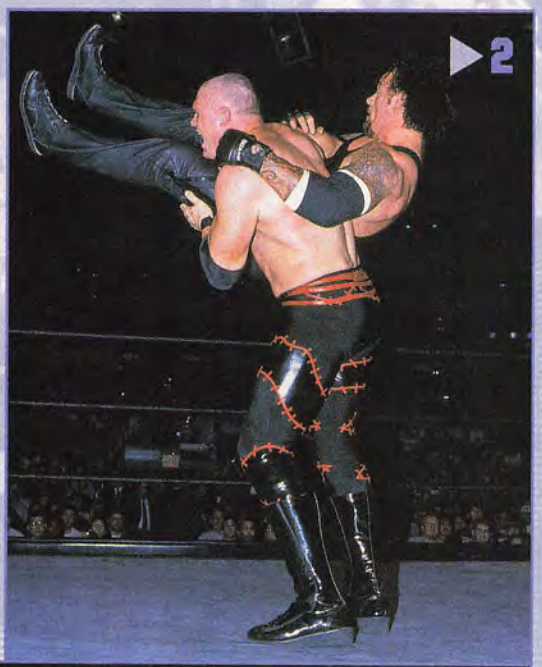
THE ACTION: The buildup to the Kane vs. Undertaker match was superbly done. WWE matchmakers effectively made Kane seem intimidated, they established 'Taker's presence even though he wasn't around, and they had fans screaming for his arrival for more than a month without getting them upset that he was teasing them with one video montage after another. When the time finally came for the two men to wrestle, everyone in Madison Square Garden was on the edge of his seat, waiting to see what exactly "The Dead Man" would look like.

When his music cued, the crowd erupted. He was led to the ring by a returning Paul Bearer as well as a number of druids, and when he walked onto the entranceway and stared down Kane, a chill came over the arena. The crowd was captivated by his presence and his new look, which was a cross between his old "Dead Man" gimmick and his more recent "American Badass" biker persona.

Jerry Lawler and Jim Ross could have called the match over before it even began, because Kane stood no chance whatsoever. His fear was palpable (he kept screaming, "You're not real!" at UT at the start), and 'Taker capitalized on it—first by staring his half-brother down for more than a minute, and then by dominating early, often, and—most importantly—late. 'Taker began the beating with a series of overhand lefts and rights that instantly backed Kane into the ropes. Kane escaped to the outside, but 'Taker gave chase and threw him into the edge of the ring before trying to remove his head from his shoulders with a guillotine-like elbowdrop and a legdrop at 1:46.

Around the 2:30 mark, UT trapped Kane in the corner and splashed into him twice, sending "The Big Red Machine" down to the mat. He then positioned Kane for a tombstone piledriver, but Kane powered out, sending 'Taker onto the mat with a back bodydrop, and then following up with a big boot to 'Taker's face. At 3:40, Kane scored with a sidewalk slam and kept his momentum going with at lariat off the top rope, earning himself a two-count.

Undertaker regained control of the match at 4:37 with a running boot to Kane's face and a legdrop that was reminiscent of Hulk Hogan across Kane's throat. At 5:02, 'Taker wrenched Kane's arm and pulled him to the turnbuckles, where he went old school and walked the top rope with plans of delivering a clubbing blow to Kane's trapezius muscle. Kane surprised UT, though, by catching him by his throat on his way down and holding on to try to choke him out. Undertaker retaliated with a chokehold of his own, but Kane won the battle, choke-slamming "The Dead Man" at 5:45. But instead of pinning 'Taker to win the match, Kane



▶ 1—Undertaker's new (old) entrance is so eerie—in a *good* way.
▶ 2—Kane didn't score with too much offense. Did anyone really expect him to?
▶ 3—"The Big Red Machine" was lucky he didn't lose his head on this legdrop.

gloated in the center of the ring, giving his half-brother time to recover. At 6:13, 'Taker sat straight up, and Kane couldn't believe his eyes. (Obviously he hasn't watched many old tapes of 'Taker.) Then things got worse for him. Undertaker returned the earlier chokeslam with one of his own at 7:02, and then finished Kane off with a devastating tombstone piledriver.

ACTION: B

SIGNIFICANCE: B

THE WINNER: The Undertaker pinned Kane at 7:42

THE REAL WINNER: Undertaker, who came back from his long hiatus looking a little more dead (but not *all the way* dead) and in the best shape of his career. (How toned can a dead man be, we ask you?) With this win, 'Taker instantly reinserted himself into Smackdown's top tier and positioned himself for a shot at Eddie Guerrero's Smackdown championship.

THE REAL LOSER: Eddie Guerrero, for obvious reasons.

ANOTHER WINNER: Paul Bearer, who returned to WWE despite putting the mouth on the promotion and on Vince McMahon during his time away.

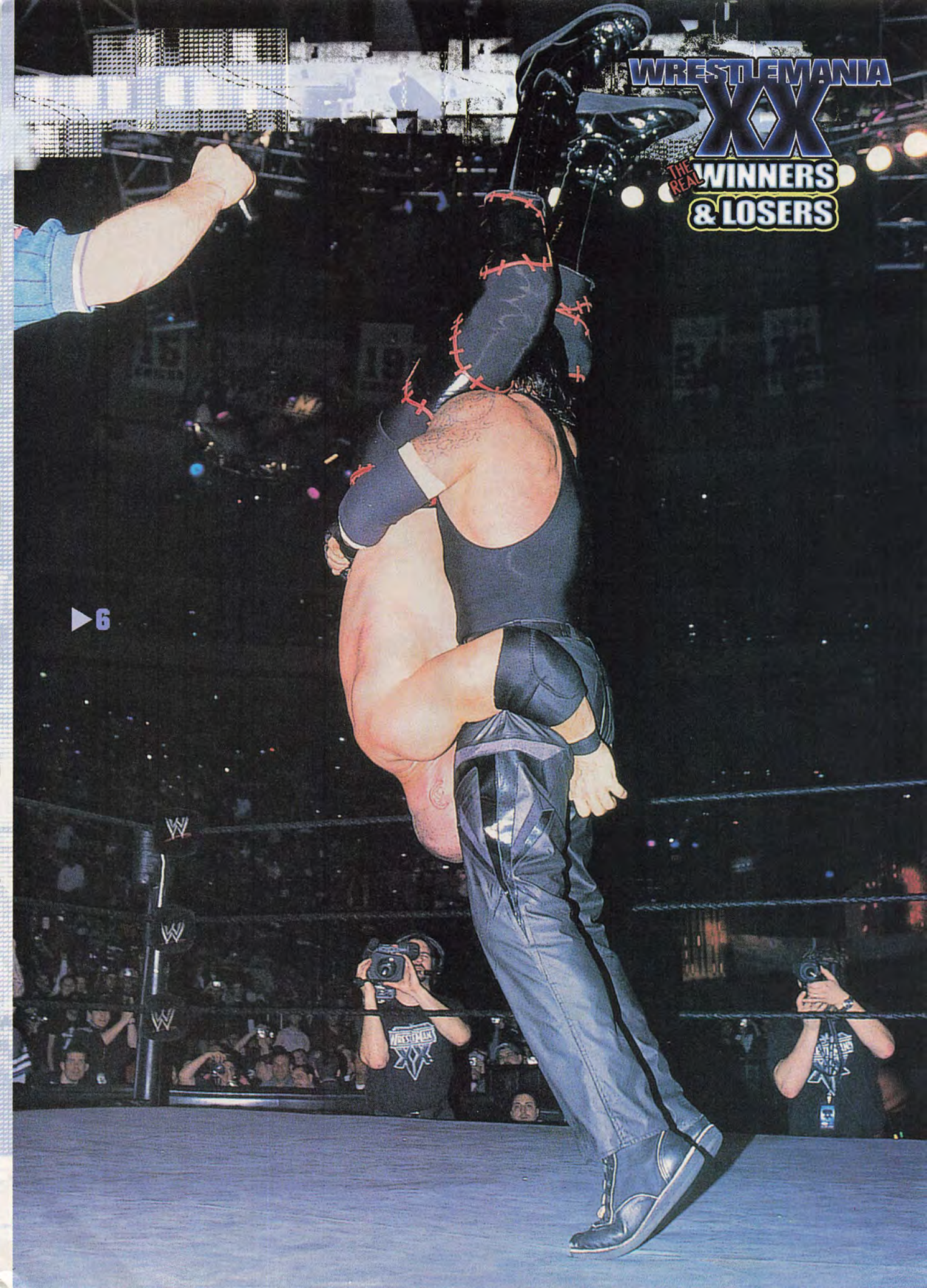
ANOTHER LOSER: Paul Bearer, who returned to WWE despite putting the mouth on the promotion and on Vince McMahon during his time away.

OKAY, ANOTHER LOSER: Kane, who never gets the respect he deserves when Undertaker's around.

YET ANOTHER WINNER: Brian Lee—the wrestler who portrayed the impostor Undertaker a decade ago. He now looks more like Undertaker than ever. Maybe he'll get lucky and WWE will try to reprise that storyline.

ONE MORE WINNER: WWE's merchandise department, which should see its sales figures for 2004 increase thanks to 'Taker's return to the dark side.

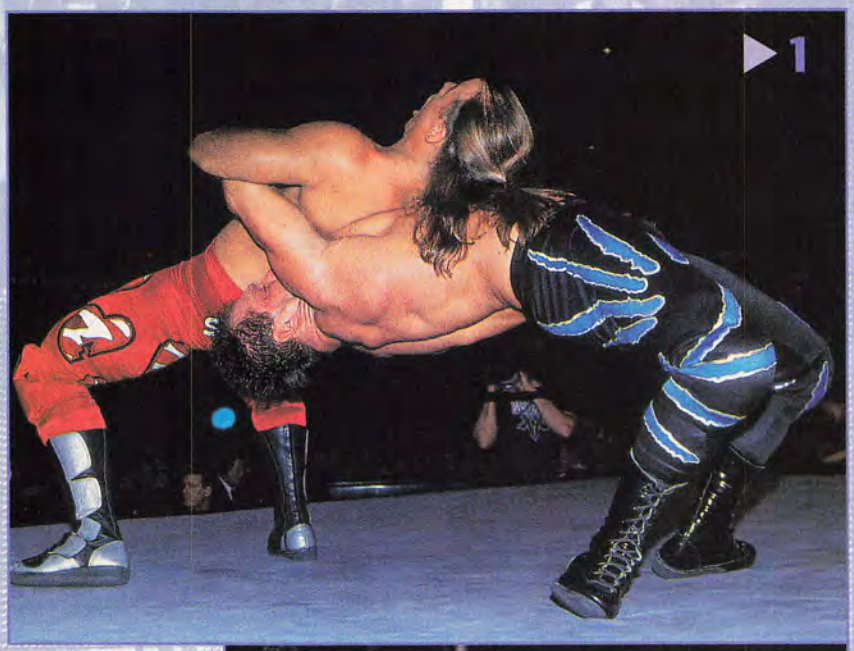
▶ 4—*Ohhhhhh* yes, Paul Bearer is back, but wasn't he just trashing WWE a few months ago?
▶ 5—There was no way UT was going to choke in his comeback match!
▶ 6—With this tombstone piledriver, "The Dead Man's" comeback becomes complete.



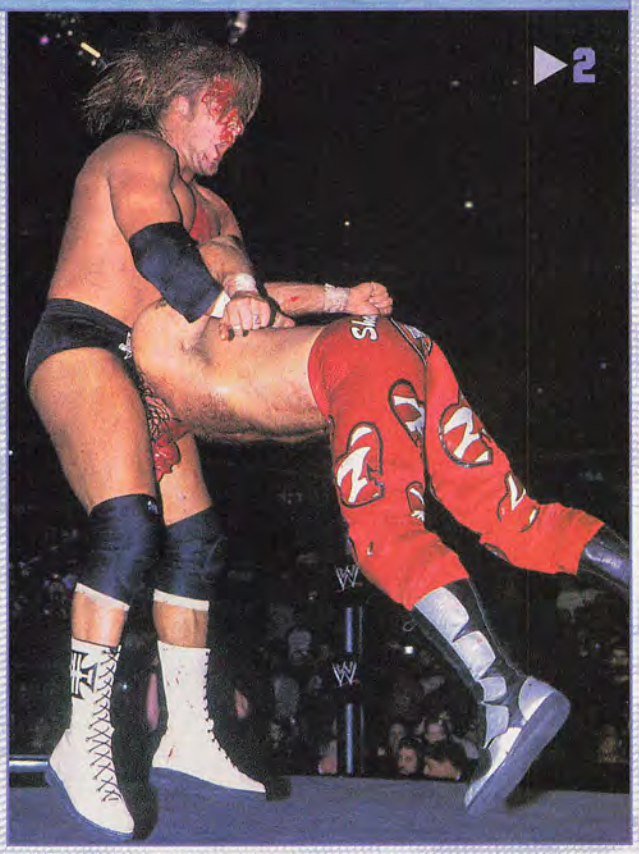
▶6

THE MATCH: Chris Benoit vs. Shawn Michaels vs. Triple-H in a triple threat match for the Raw championship

THE ACTION: This match began exactly like of most us expected it to—with Michaels and Benoit battling it out to decide which one of them was going to be Triple-H's main aggressor. Benoit advanced on Helmsley at the outset, but Michaels pushed him out of the way so he could get in a few swings on the defending champion. Undaunted, Benoit came back at Michaels with a flurry of Ric Flair-like chops that left Michaels' chest red, Benoit's hand stinging, and Helmsley on the outside.



With Triple-H temporarily out of the way, Michaels and Benoit turned their full attention to each other. Benoit attempted to put the match away early by going for a crossface, but Michaels wouldn't have any of it. He countered the hold and wiggled Benoit into a pinning predicament. Benoit struggled to bridge out, then attempted the crossface for a second time, but to no avail. At this point, Triple-H had gotten his wind back, so he re-entered the ring and took on both men simultaneously. Eventually, all three men lost focus because of their inability to concentrate on any one opponent for long.



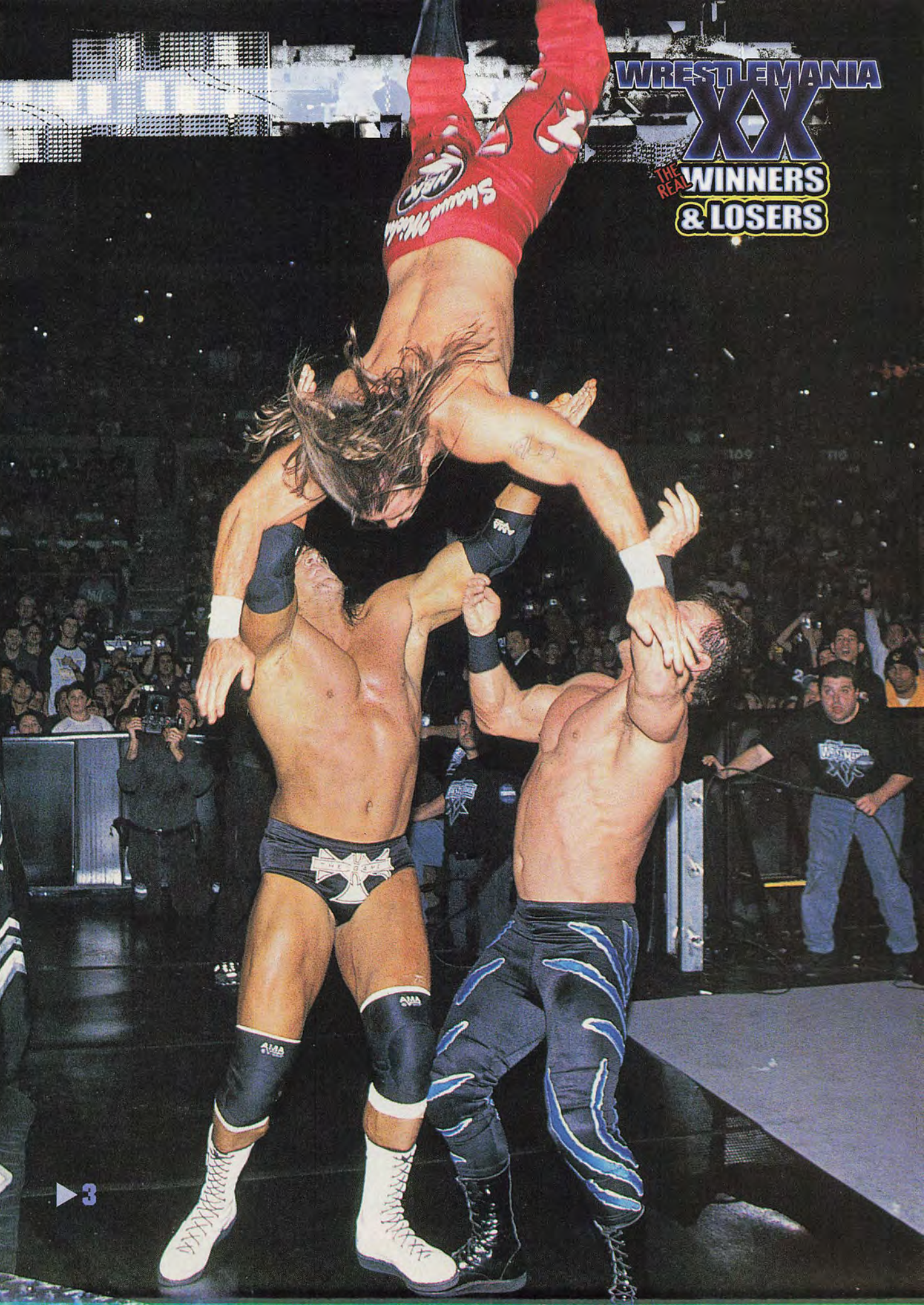
Some order was restored when Triple-H knocked Benoit off the ring apron and then followed him to the outside. At that point, Michaels sensed an opportunity to attempt the first high-risk maneuver of the match. He climbed one of the turnbuckles and moonsaulted onto his opponents, both of whom barely had time to brace themselves.

The match continued going back and forth for the next 10 minutes, with all three men taking turns controlling the action. No one was in serious jeopardy of losing until Benoit catapulted Michaels into the ringpost. Michaels came up bloody, and Benoit tried to capitalize on his weakened condition by snaring him in the crossface. HBK was ready to tap, but Triple-H smartly grabbed his hand from the outside so that it couldn't hit the mat.

Around the 15-minute mark, the match spilled to the outside once again. Hunter threw Benoit into the steel ring barrier and began taking apart Michael Cole and Tazz' announce table. Sensing danger, Benoit scrambled to Helmsley, tackled him onto a separate announce table, and prepared to backdrop him from one table to the other. Hunter blocked the maneuver and, together with Michaels, suplexed Benoit through the Smackdown announcers' table. Benoit's night appeared to be over.

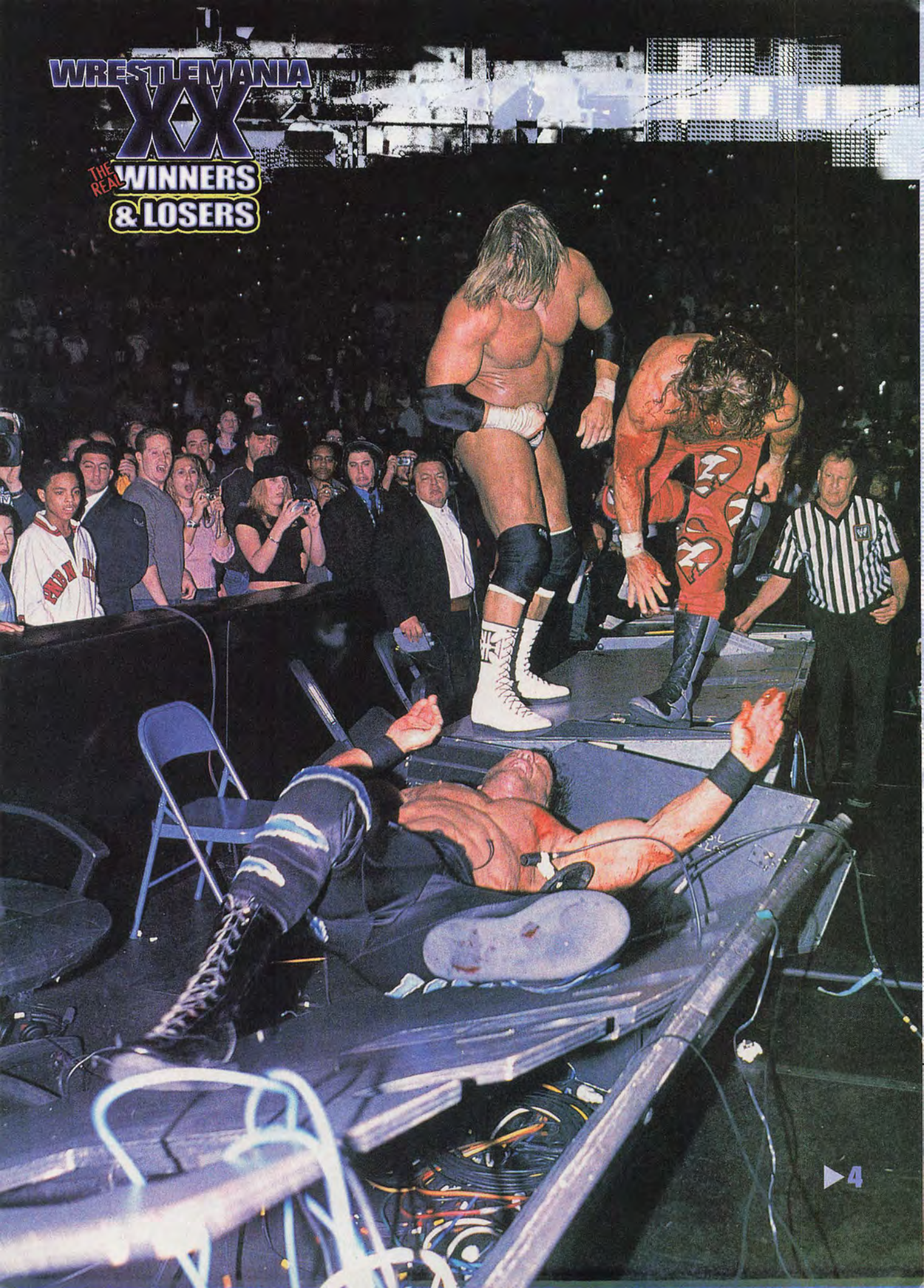
Helmsley and Michaels continued to duke it out in the ring, and Helmsley nearly won the match with a well-timed pedigree, but Benoit

▶ 1—What incredible strength and willpower displayed by Michaels and Benoit as they bridge to their feet!
▶ 2—A bloody Triple-H drops a bloody Michaels with a bloody good pedigree
▶ 3—The first high-risk move of the match: a moonsault by HBK that takes out two opponents at once


WRESTLEMANIA
XX
THE REAL WINNERS
& LOSERS

WRESTLEMANIA XX

THE REAL WINNERS & LOSERS



regained his senses just in time to make the save. A few minutes later, he surprised Michaels by ducking a superkick attempt and then dumping him to the outside. Triple-H tried to take advantage of the distraction by going for a pedigree on Benoit, but "The Crippler" reversed the maneuver into a crossface. The defending champion escaped the hold for a second, but Benoit quickly reapplied it. Not long after, Triple-H tapped out.

ACTION: A+

SIGNIFICANCE: A+

THE WINNER: Chris Benoit, when he forced Triple-H to tap out at 24:02 to win the Raw championship

THE REAL WINNER: Benoit. On a night when the Madison Square Garden faithful bitterly chanted, "Hey, hey, hey, goodbye!" (among other things) at Brock Lesnar and Bill Goldberg (thereby cementing the sentiment that WWE fans don't appreciate guys who they believe join WWE just to make a quick buck), watching Benoit wrestle in one of the most well-received matches in WrestleMania history and then hoist the Raw championship belt above his head was a truly memorable moment. Every tear he shed was real, every emotion he displayed genuine. He represents everything that is good about professional wrestling, and it was nice to see professional wrestling reward him for that.

THE REAL LOSER: NWA-TNA, Ring of Honor, and every other promotion that claims to have the sport's best wrestlers. Simply put, when you see a match like this one come together, you know that no matter how many waves a niche wrestling promotion makes, there's nothing that it can do to compare with what WWE has to offer on its best night.

ANOTHER WINNER: Triple-H, who proved to his naysayers that he still has what it takes to compete at the very top. You might not like the guy's political maneuvering, but when it comes to his wrestling ability and overall passion for the sport, you have to give him his props. He hung tough with Benoit and Michaels, placed much of the match's momentum on his shoulders, and carried all of its heel heat. He possesses all the qualities wrestling promoters salivate over and, in the ring, he's starting to resemble the Hunter Hearst Helmsley of 2000, which is a very good thing. He remains one of WWE's MVPs. Like him or not, WrestleMania XX was a testament to his professionalism.

AND YET ANOTHER WINNER: Shawn Michaels, who also is rightfully earning his share of MVP recognition. This match was just one of a string of matches in which he's been involved that have captured best-of-the-card honors of late. Who knew that six years after his retirement, he'd become one of WWE's most dependable main event performers?

ANOTHER LOSER: Dr. Hae-Dong Jho, whose "minimally invasive spinal surgery" hadn't yet captured the attention of WWE wrestlers when Benoit was scheduled to undergo spinal fusion surgery in the summer of 2001. While Kurt Angle has continued to experience neck problems since undergoing Dr. Jho's procedure in April 2003, Benoit is rolling right along without reporting many adverse effects of the traditional spinal fusion procedure. Considering how well Benoit has recovered from the surgery and how poorly Angle has fared, the more invasive method might once again become the preferred method among WWE wrestlers.

▶4—Looks like Benoit's night is over when he takes a spill through a table (but looks can deceive!)
▶5—Benoit borrows from Bret ... but no tapout yet
▶6—After 18 years, a dream *finally* realized!

WRESTLEMANIA FLASHBACK

THE FIRST TIME IS ALWAYS THE BEST (OR IS IT?)

By Dan Murphy

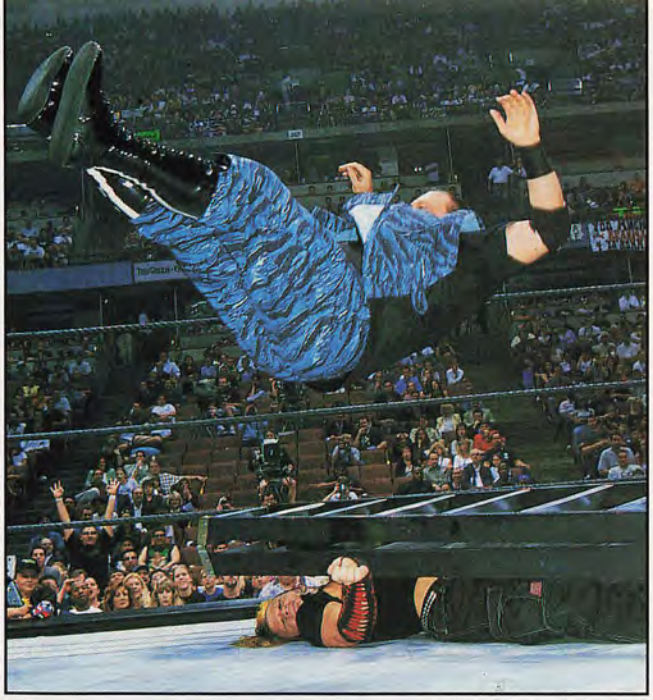
THE AVERAGE MAN on the street may not know much about professional wrestling, but odds are he knows what WrestleMania is. It's an event that transcends pro wrestling, where bodyslams, suplexes, and clotheslines invade popular culture and enter mainstream consciousness, if only for a few hours. WrestleMania represents the pinnacle in sports entertainment, equal parts Super Bowl and opening night at Carnegie Hall. WrestleMania Sunday is the date around which the wrestling calendar revolves, and it's the day all eyes are fixed on WWE.

Every wrestler who ever laced up a pair of boots has dreamed of competing at WrestleMania. But the glare from the 'Mania spotlights can be blinding. Months of buildup and hype to the extreme come down to mere minutes in the ring. Win at WrestleMania and your career can take off. Lose at WrestleMania and you better come up with a backup plan—and do it quickly. Look bad at WrestleMania and watch your career fall apart.

In this very special *PWI* analysis, we look at all the stars of WrestleMania XX and remember their first WrestleMania matches. How did they perform when they first walked through the curtain on wrestling's biggest night? Was that virgin WrestleMania the start of a new phase of their career?

This year, a staggering 21 wrestlers were competing (and not just appearing) in their first 'Mania. The WM rookie class of 2004 was made up of John Cena, Rob Conway, Rene Dupree, Mark Jindrak, Garrison Cade, Batista, Randy Orton, Torrie Wilson, Jackie Gayda, Stacy Keibler, Nunzio, Jamie Noble, Tajiri, Akio, Funaki, Shannon Moore, Ultimo Dragon, Billy Kidman, Bill Goldberg, Doug Basham, and Danny Basham.

Perhaps they can learn from our analysis of those who have gone before them. Our findings are as different as the wrestlers who have competed at the event itself.



THE BIG SHOW

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XV (1999)
OPPONENT: Mankind
OUTCOME: Lost by disqualification
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: The Big Show dropped the ball in his first 'Mania match—there's just no way around it. He made his WWE debut just one month earlier, interfering in Steve Austin's match against Vince McMahon by cutting through the ring from below and attacking "Stone-Cold." The former WCW World champion came in as a main eventer and was unable to dispose of Mankind, despite his garguantuan size advantage. And that meant Mankind got to referee the main event of Austin vs. The Rock. While he intentionally got himself disqualified and didn't lose outright, Show set a standard of underachievement that dogged him for years afterward. Had he dominated Foley, he probably would have earned a World title shot on the next PPV. Instead he faced Mankind in a rematch and lost in a boiler room brawl.
GRADE: C-

THE DUDLEY BOYZ

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XVI (2000)
OPPONENTS: Edge & Christian and The Hardy Boyz
OUTCOME: Edge & Christian won a three-team ladder match to win the WWF World tag team title
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: This match helped bring ladder matches, already an exciting concept, into the 21st century. The three teams stole the show at two consecutive WrestleManias with their high-risk, daredevil tactics. These were more than insane spotfests, and the Dudleys' pacing, methodical approach, and power moves gave them a psychology missing in most specialty matches of this nature. While they may have seemed out of their element initially, Buh Buh Ray and D-Von were the unsung heroes of this clash. It was one engrossing chapter of an amazing three-team rivalry.
GRADE: A

ROB VAN DAM

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania X8 (2002)
OPPONENT: William Regal
OUTCOME: Pinned Regal to win the Intercontinental title
HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Rob Van Dam was one of the few "outsiders" to emerge from the WCW/ECW invasion looking stronger than he did when the WCW/ECW faction came together. Despite WWE's efforts to push him as a heel, Van Dam remained one of the promotion's most popular wrestlers. When he beat Regal, it looked like the I-C title would springboard him to Match of the Year candidates and an eventual run as a world champion. Those things have never quite materialized. Part of the reason might have been a somewhat disappointing showing by RVD during this match. Analysts expected a style clash between Van Dam and Regal and got a rather bland contest. The match made members of

the Creative team wonder if Van Dam could wrestle "WWE style." Apparently some are still wondering.

GRADE: B-

BOOKER T

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania X8 (2002)

OPPONENT: Edge

OUTCOME: Lost by pinfall

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: This was a classic example of winning by losing. After wrestling as a serious heel throughout 2001, Booker loosened up in 2002. The winner of this match supposedly received a contract for a Japanese shampoo commercial (how's that for incentive?!), and Booker was fighting with all his heart for the chance to endorse a ridiculous product. Despite losing, Booker proved he could do serious matches *and*

comedy, and that helped make him one of the promotion's most popular—and successful—wrestlers over the next two years. We have never seen that commercial, by the way.

GRADE: B+

CHRIS JERICHO

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XVI (2000)

OPPONENTS: Chris Benoit and Kurt Angle

OUTCOME: Benoit won the first fall to win the Intercontinental title; Jericho won the second fall to win the European title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Jericho was able to put his I-C title feud with Chyna behind him with an exciting match against two of the best up-and-coming wrestlers (yes, Angle and Benoit were considered up-and-comers in WWE four years ago) in the company. By holding his own against Benoit and Angle, Jericho earned credibility. He would have earned more had he won the first fall and regained the I-C title, but at least he

didn't walk out of the match empty-handed like Angle, who lost two belts without getting pinned once and still grumbles about it to this day.

GRADE: B+

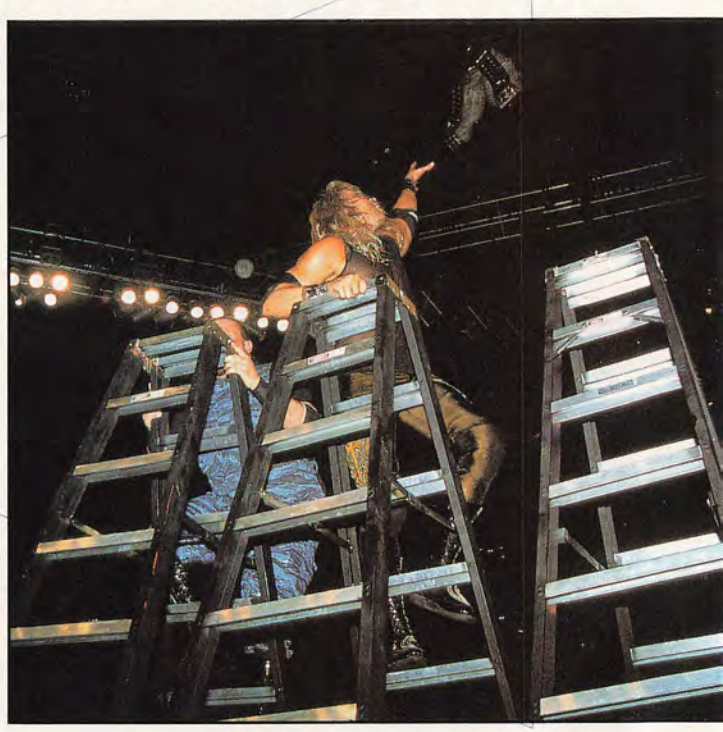
CHRISTIAN

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XVI (2000)

OPPONENTS: The Dudley Boyz and The Hardy Boyz

OUTCOME: Edge & Christian won the WWF World tag team title in a three-team ladder match

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Edge and Christian came out of the most exciting match on the



card with the tag team gold. Are there many better ways to make a WrestleMania debut? It was a coming-of-age for the former members of The Brood. They established themselves as stars of the future.

GRADE: A+

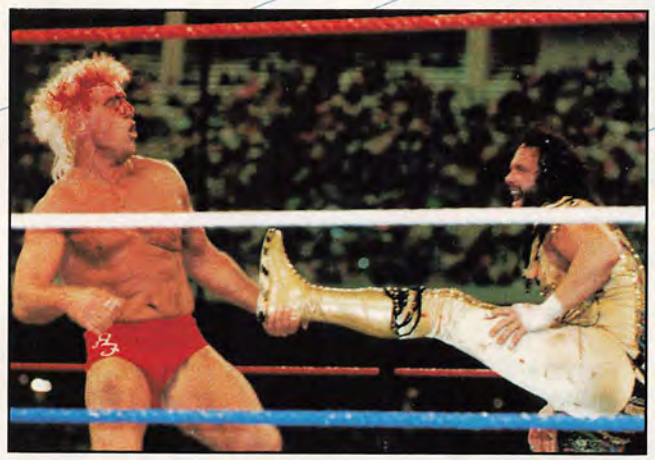
RIC FLAIR

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania VIII (1992)

OPPONENT: Randy Savage

OUTCOME: Lost the WWF World heavyweight title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Flair made his big splash earlier in the year at the Royal Rumble, where he lasted 62:02 and won the vacant World title. By all rights, Flair should have been facing his arch-nemesis, Hulk Hogan, in wrestling's biggest dream



match on this card, but Hogan was tied up with Sid Justice (Vicious). Flair made the most of the situation, delivering an intense and entertaining match against Savage, based around his alleged dalliance with Savage's wife at the time, Miss Elizabeth. But in a show of where Flair ranked with the WWF powers-that-be, his match was the fifth bout on the card, occupying a mid-card spot. Even without the World title being involved, Hogan, as usual, commanded the main event.

GRADE: B

THE ROCK

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIII (1997)

OPPONENT: The Sultan (Rikishi)

OUTCOME: Defeated The Sultan to retain the Intercontinental title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Let's face it, the masked Sultan was never much of a threat to win the Intercontinental title, even with The Iron Sheik and Bob Backlund in his corner. A young Rocky Maivia wrestled as the model babyface, throwing some beautiful high dropkicks and playing fair throughout. This was about when the fans really started to turn against him, which shouldn't have been so surprising when you look at the way they embraced Steve Austin later in the night. Rock wrestled well, but he certainly didn't show that he

could one day become the most electrifying man in sports entertainment. Don't feel bad if you had totally forgotten about this bout.

GRADE: C+

MICK FOLEY

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIII (1997)

OPPONENTS: Owen Hart & Davey Boy Smith

OUTCOME: Hart & Smith wrestled to a double-countout against Mankind and Vader

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: That's right, both members of The Rock 'n' Sock Connection made their 'Mania debuts in 1997. It's hard to believe Vader and Mankind—bitter enemies a year earlier—could make such an effective team. This match was

largely a brawl, which allowed Foley to do what he does best. He may have been seen as the weak link going into the match, but he showed promise in going toe-to-toe with Hart and The British Bulldog, the reigning WWF World tag team champs. In the big picture, it was a filler match of little significance, but Foley looked respectable.

GRADE: B

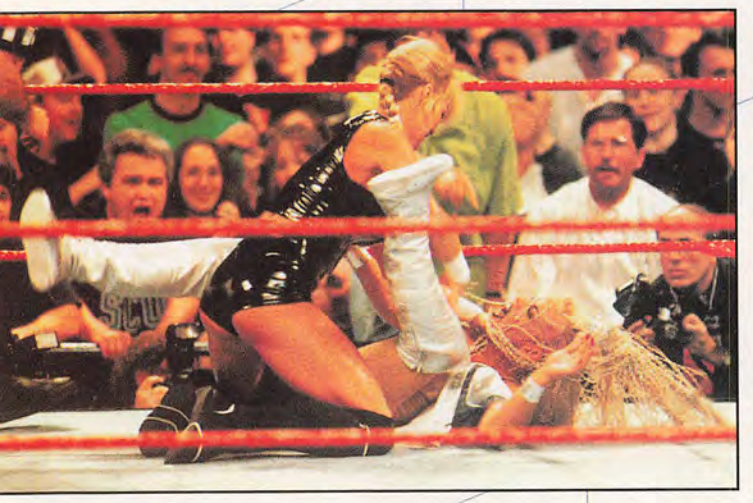
SABLE

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIV (1998)

OPPONENTS: Goldust & Luna Vachon

OUTCOME: Sable & Marc Mero defeated Goldust & Vachon

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: This was a specialty match and an attempt to find a role for Sable, who was becoming very popular. Sable surprised everyone by outwrestling Luna. Based on her 'Mania showing,



the women's division was brought back from dormancy and Sable became the lynchpin of the division for a while. It wouldn't last, as Sable was never as good as Trish, Lita, Jazz, Victoria, and Molly are today, but she was fast becoming one of WWE's top stars and most marketable personalities.

GRADE: A-

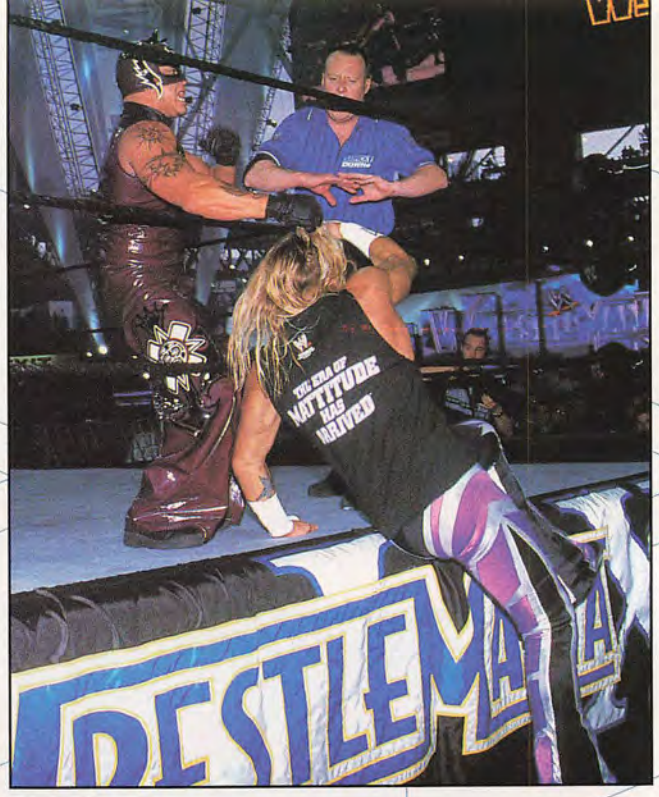
REY MISTERIO JR.

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIX (2003)

OPPONENT: Matt Hardy

OUTCOME: Lost by pinfall

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Virtually everyone assumed that Rey Rey would be crowned cruiserweight king in the fast-paced opener at Safeco Field in Seattle, but Hardy and his good friend Shannon Moore had other plans. Misterio thrilled the fans with his 619 and West Coast pop, but Hardy escaped with the title, holding the ropes as he pinned his rival. The two cruiserweights put on an exciting match in the few minutes they had, but Rey came up short (no pun intended). It was a disappointing night for the Luchador, but it didn't hurt him in the long run, as it just made everyone want to



see his eventual victory over Hardy that much more.

GRADE: B

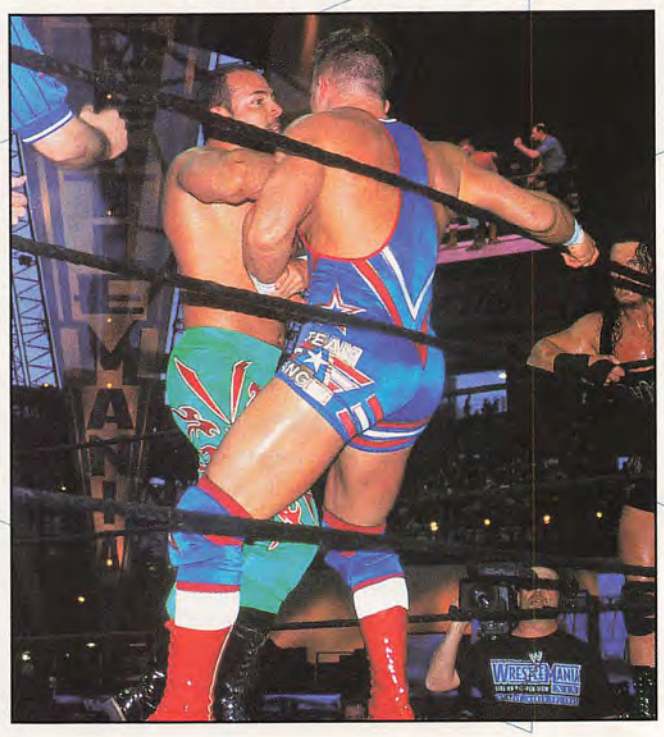
CHAVO GUERRERO JR.

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIX (2003)

OPPONENTS: Shelton Benjamin & Charlie Haas and Chris Benoit & Rhyno

OUTCOME: Benjamin & Haas beat Eddie & Chavo Guerrero Jr. and Chris Benoit & Rhyno in a three-way match to retain the Smackdown tag team title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Three-



and four-way tag team title matches, unless they are ladder matches, TLC matches, or something of the like, generally don't get remembered, and to be honest, this one will be no different. But Chavo Jr. did show that he belonged in the ring with other mid-carders on the rise, specifically Uncle Eddie and Chris Benoit. In fact, we wrote the following in the August 2003 issue of *PWI:* "Of the six wrestlers that competed in the triple threat tag team match, Chavo easily gave the best showing."

GRADE: B

BROCK LESNAR

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIX (2003)

OPPONENT: Kurt Angle

OUTCOME: Won the WWE Smackdown title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: The only thing standing in the way of Lesnar and a perfect WrestleMania debut was his botched shooting star press. Lesnar's first 'Mania match was the main event, which he won cleanly and decisively. "The Next Big Thing" officially

became just the, *um,* "Big Thing" with a convincing win over Angle. Too bad we can't make the point that it established him as *the* superstar who would carry a huge load for WWE for a decade or more to come. Not quite.

GRADE: A+

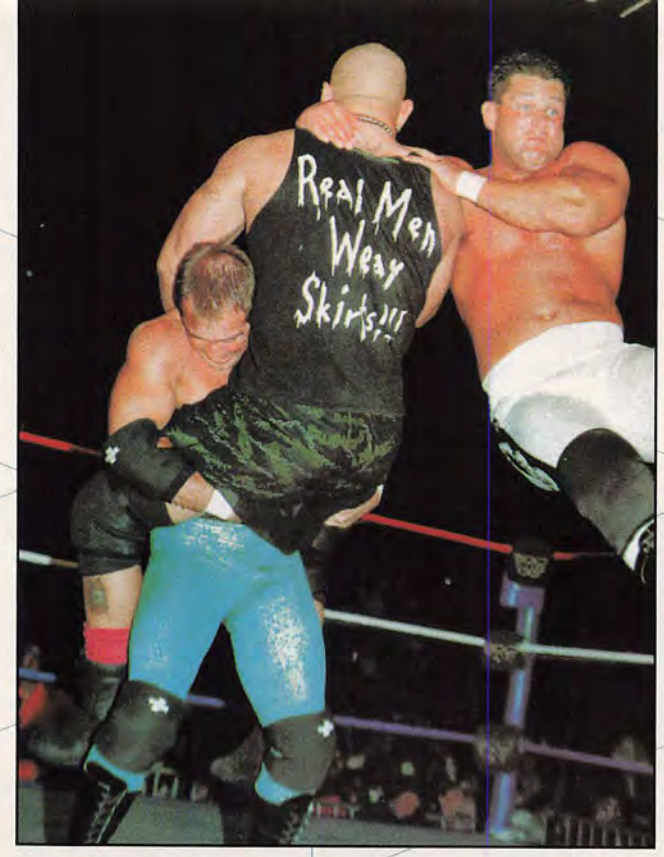
SCOTTY TOO HOTTY

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIV (1998)

OPPONENT: Tag team battle royal

OUTCOME: LOD 2000 (The Road Warriors) won a tag team battle royal

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Insignificant. That's a kind way of putting it. Can you believe Scotty has been on three WrestleManias? You might have thought this year's was his first. Scott *Taylor* was



pinned by "Bodacious" Bart Gunn in a brief appearance. Six years later, he's a tag team champion.

GRADE: D-

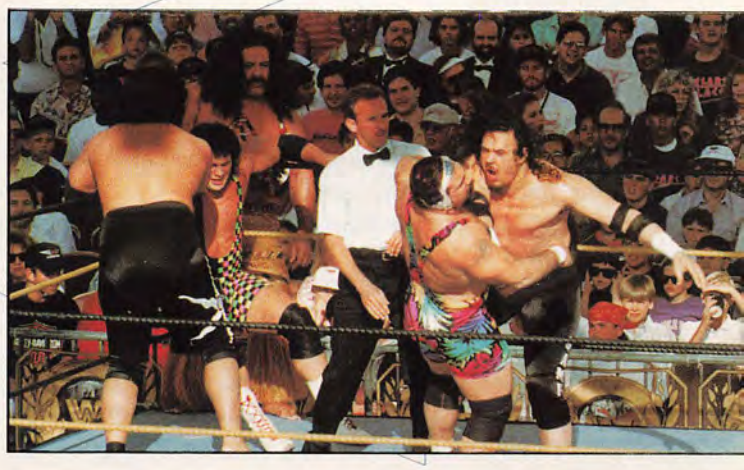
RIKISHI

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania IX (1993)

OPPONENTS: Rick & Scott Steiner

OUTCOME: The Steiners defeated Headshrinkers Fatu & Samu

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: WrestleMania IX was considered by many to be the worst 'Mania ever, but the stiff tag battle between Samu and Fatu (one of Rikishi's many previous identities) and the Steiners was somewhat memorable. Although the Steiners won, the 'Shrinkers gained respect, as many observers felt Rick and Scott were the best team in the business, and they just barely topped the Samoans. It was a solid performance.



GRADE: B

RON SIMMONS

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIII (1997)

OPPONENTS: The Road Warriors & Ahmed Johnson

OUTCOME: The Road Warriors & Johnson defeated Faarooq (Simmons), Crush, & Savio Vega

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: This six-man match quickly degenerated into a Chicago street-fight, and it was tough to beat the LOD at that game. The wild brawl was sandwiched between the epic Bret Hart-Steve Austin "I Quit" match and the main event (The

Undertaker vs. Sid Vicious), which would be a tough spot for anyone to fill. The former WCW World heavyweight champion performed admirably, but the match really meant very little.

GRADE: C+

BRADSHAW

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIII (1997)

OPPONENTS: The Headbangers, Phil Lafon & Doug Furnas, and Henry & Phineas Godwinn

OUTCOME: The Headbangers won a four-team elimination match

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Not surprisingly at all, Bradshaw's team with Barry Windham (The New Blackjacks) never really took off. This was as close as Bradshaw would come to the tag title for several years, however. Like his partner, Faarooq, in his debut, Bradshaw performed reasonably well, but didn't get much

of a chance to shine.

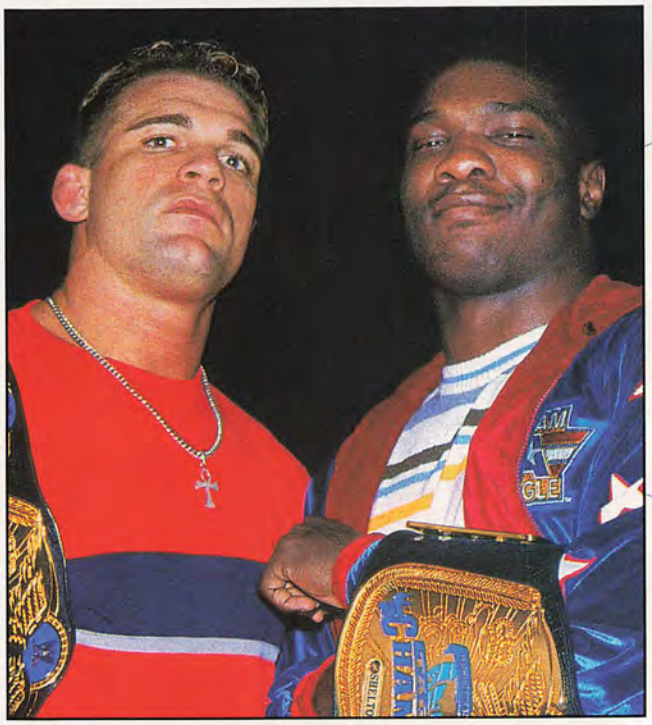
GRADE: B-

SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIX (2003)

OPPONENTS: Eddie & Chavo Guerrero Jr. and Chris Benoit & Rhyno

OUTCOME: Benjamin & Haas defeated Los Guerreros and Benoit & Rhyno to win a three-way match and retain the Smackdown tag team title



HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: A strong effort from Benjamin and Haas in a three-way tag title match that could have benefited from a few more minutes. The two former amateur standouts were only a few months removed from their WWE TV debuts, and they showed they belonged in WWE. This win probably did a lot to earn them *PWI's* Tag Team of the Year honors for 2003. Now, a year later, both are going solo.

GRADE: B+

VICTORIA

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIX (2003)

OPPONENTS: Trish Stratus and Jazz

OUTCOME: Stratus defeated Victoria and Jazz in a three-way match to win the women's title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: This was actually one of the better matches of WrestleMania XIX, and it pointed out the unprecedented depth in the women's division. Victoria showed a fine blend of power and technique in dominating Trish and countering Jazz. The crowd in Seattle wanted a feel-good moment here, and Trish provided them with one when she came out on top and won Victoria's title, but all three women gave terrific performances in the triple threat match.

GRADE: A

MOLLY HOLLY

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania X8 (2002)

OPPONENTS: The Hurricane and Christian

OUTCOME: Molly scored a surprise pinfall backstage to briefly hold the hardcore title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: According to the WrestleMania program, the hardcore match was supposed to be between champion Maven and Goldust, but Mighty Molly walloped her friend and partner, The Hurricane, after he stole the title, and enjoyed a *very* short title reign. She dropped the belt to Christian minutes later. The significance was negligible, but it made for good comic relief and one of the show's more entertaining moments.

GRADE: C

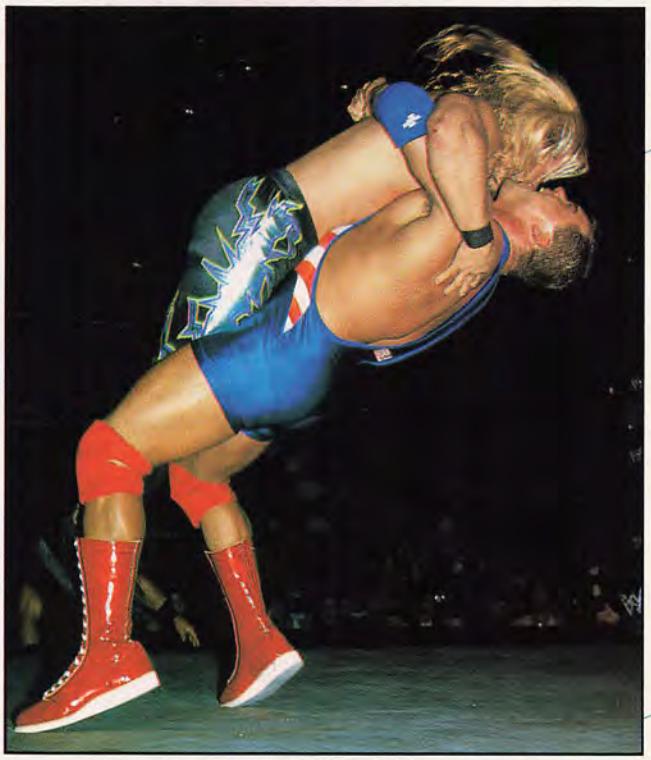
KURT ANGLE

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XVI (2000)

OPPONENTS: Chris Benoit and Chris Jericho

OUTCOME: Benoit won the first fall to win the Intercontinental title; Jericho won the second fall to win the European title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Poor



Angle—he lost two titles without ever getting pinned or being forced to submit. Nonetheless, the Olympian was the focal point of the match and came out of it looking like a world-class crybaby. He got plenty of chances to shine against both Benoit and Jericho, too. Though Angle "lost," no one ever beat him. He had his credibility intact and was ready to expand his horizons and challenge for the World title. Maybe WWE should have trashed the concept of three-ways after seeing the result of this match.

GRADE: B

EDDIE GUERRERO

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XVI (2000)

OPPONENT: Chyna and Too Cool

OUTCOME: Chyna & Too Cool defeated Guerrero, Perry Saturn, & Dean Malenko

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: It wasn't

the kind of WrestleMania debut these three Radicals were expecting, being humbled by a comedy team and a woman. However, this is where Eddie fell hard for Chyna, and the era of "Latino Heat" was born shortly afterward. This match might have been a death knell for Saturn and Malenko's WWE careers, but it would propel Guerrero to superstardom. He looked good in the match despite the fact that he had just returned from a stint on the injured list due to a dislocated elbow.

GRADE: A

KANE

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XIV (1998)
OPPONENT: The Undertaker

OUTCOME: Lost by pinfall

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Kane had made 'Taker's life a living hell for months prior to this match. When the "brothers" finally squared off, it was one of the biggest, most-anticipated matches of the year. It took three crushing tombstone piledrivers for 'Taker to finish off his brother, firmly establishing Kane as a monster. Six years later, Kane's reputation is still pretty much intact (and he's still at odds with Undertaker, though there have been reconciliations in between). It was a losing effort, but it did a lot to establish Kane's toughness.

GRADE: B+

THE UNDERTAKER

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania VII (1991)
OPPONENT: Jimmy Snuka
OUTCOME: Won by pinfall

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: 'Taker's decade of dominance got off to a rousing start when he destroyed a bona fide legend in just 4:20. He has never

looked back. UT remains undefeated at WrestleMania (12-0), and his record isn't likely to ever be matched. Beating Snuka positioned 'Taker for a shot at the WWF World title, which he received (and made the most of) later that year.

GRADE: A

CHRIS BENOIT

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XVI (2000)
OPPONENTS: Kurt Angle and Chris Jericho
OUTCOME: Benoit won the first fall to win the Intercontinental title; Jericho won the second fall to win the European title

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: No one came out of this match looking bad, but Benoit had the most to lose. He won the I-C title by scoring the first fall, so he came out with a championship. But Benoit had recently won the WCW World title and had to be considered the heavy favorite in the match. Getting pinned by Jericho for the second fall tempered the excitement of his win earlier, so it was a mixed bag for "The Canadian Crippler." Great match, though.

GRADE: B

TRIPLE-H

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania XII (1996)
OPPONENT: The Ultimate Warrior
OUTCOME: Lost by pinfall

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Helmsley certainly didn't look like "The Game" in this glorified squash loss to the Warrior. Warrior needed just 98 seconds to beat Hunter, and it took a few years for him to re-establish himself as a serious threat after that loss. To his credit, Helmsley got into a backstage melee with the debuting Marc Mero over his own treatment of Sable after the match, setting himself up for a prominent new feud right away. It was a smart move that he hoped would get the fans to forget about his poor showing. Who would have thought he'd become the dominant force he is today?

GRADE: F

SHAWN MICHAELS

FIRST WRESTLEMANIA: WrestleMania V (1989)
OPPONENTS: Akeem & Big Bossman
OUTCOME: Akeem & Bossman defeated The Rockers

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MATCH: Michaels and Marty Jannetty collectively gave up almost 300 pounds in this match, and it ended up costing them. The Rockers had plenty of fans, but experts questioned whether they'd ever be able to succeed in the giant-dominated WWF. Michaels hit most of his trademark high-risk moves in the losing effort. Even though they lost, Michaels didn't really lose any credibility. If anything, he gave the fans a small tease of the WrestleMania greatness he would provide in years to come.

GRADE: B- □

BROCK SHOCK!

Next Big Thing For

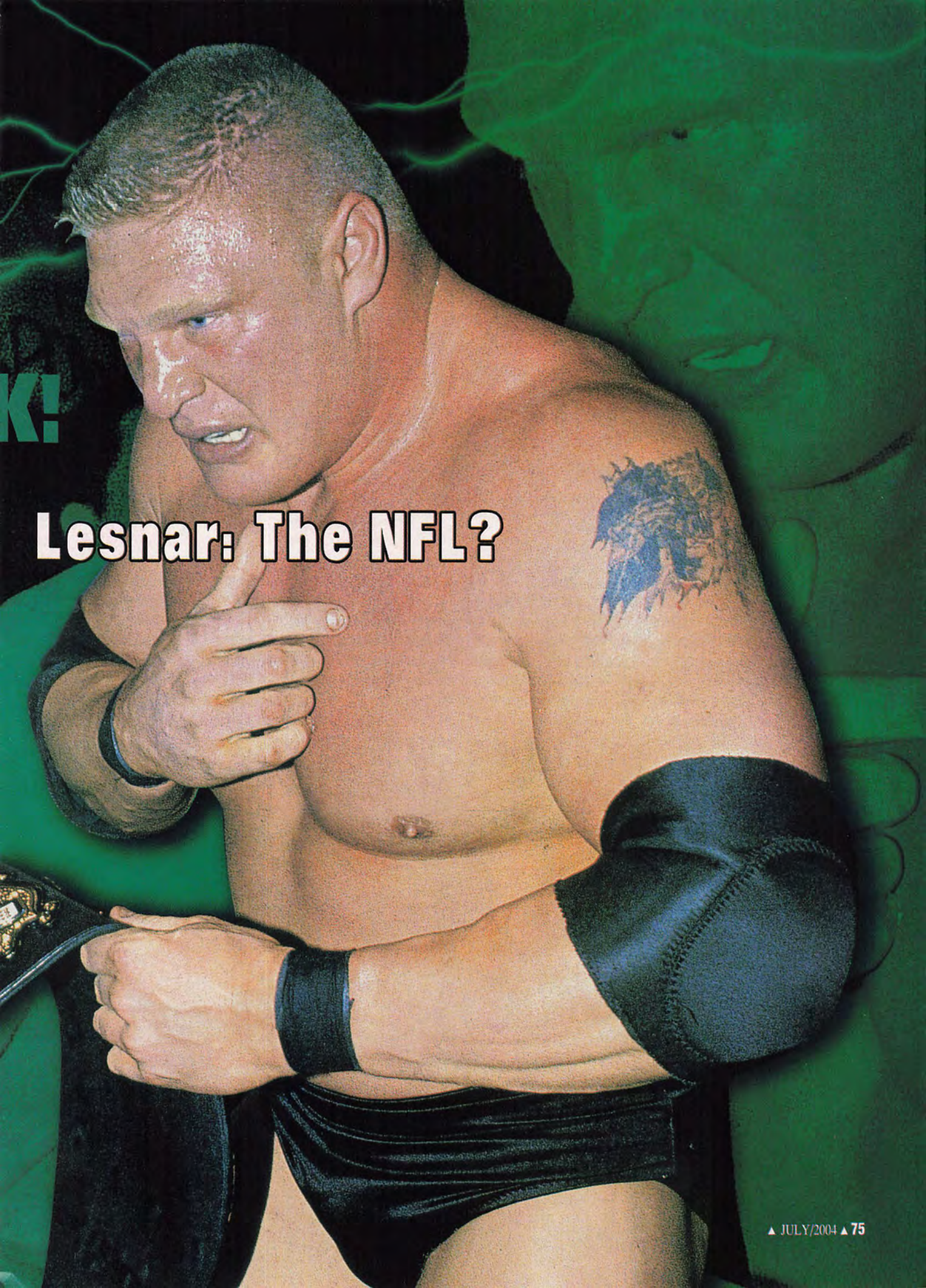
By Dan Murphy

IT WAS AN announcement that seemed to come out of nowhere.

As the entire WWE roster geared up for WrestleMania XX, Brock Lesnar stunned that entire WWE roster and the rest of the wrestling universe with the announcement that he would be leaving wrestling to pursue a career in the National Football League. And he'd be doing it immediately after his match with Bill Goldberg at wrestling's annual show of shows.

One of WWE's featured stars was simply walking away after WrestleMania. It was a completely unprecedented decision that rocked WWE to the core and left fans questioning why Brock would throw away a guaranteed wrestling contract for an NFL tryout.

What caused the three-time former Smackdown champion to abandon wrestling, and what are his chances of making it in the NFL? In this exclusive analysis, we examine what led Lesnar to his unorthodox decision and the fallout from the most stunning story of the year.



K!

Lesnar: The NFL?

What was supposed to be a dream match—Brock Lesnar vs. Goldberg, colossal WrestleMania showdown—turned into a dud of a bout, totally overshadowed by Lesnar's announcement that he, like Goldberg, was going to leave WWE after the match ... and, of course, the crowd reaction.

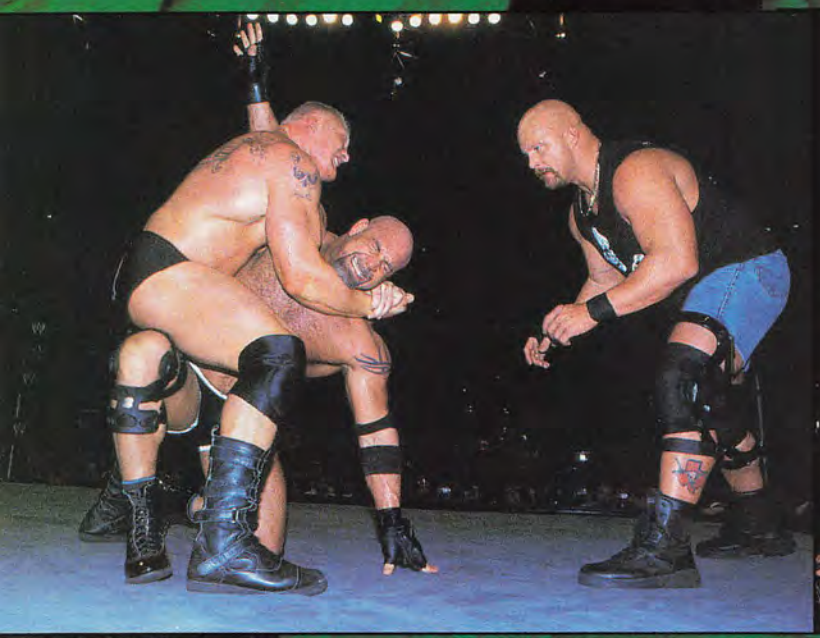
WHY DID HE QUIT?

Stories about Lesnar's frustration and unhappiness with WWE had circulated for weeks prior to his announcement. The first sign of trouble came when Lesnar complained about WWE's grueling travel schedule, particularly its recent overseas tours. Lesnar grumbled that the travel schedule kept him from adhering to his usual workout regimen and made it impossible for him to have any semblance of a personal life, especially when it came to seeing his young daughter back home in Minnesota.

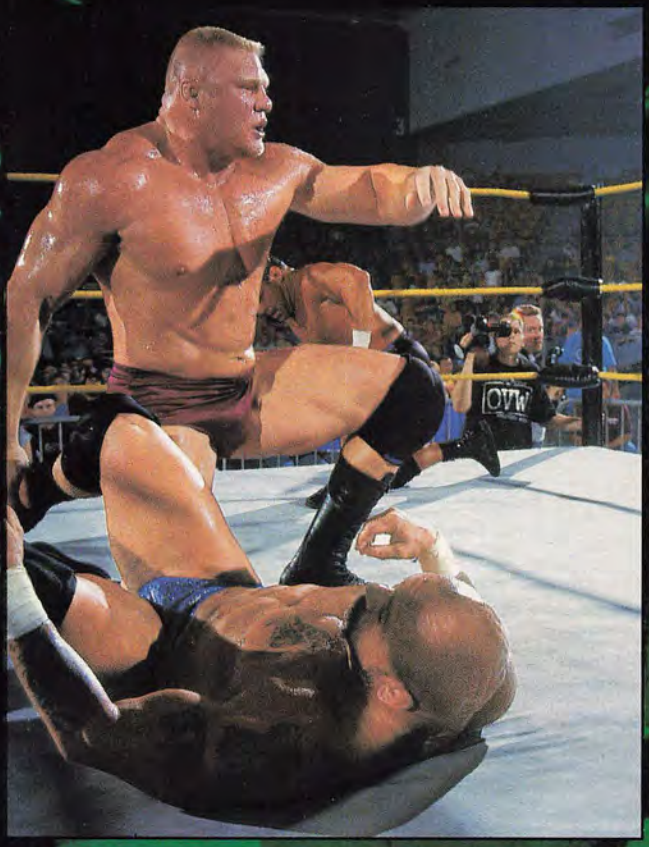
Lesnar didn't get much sympathy from the locker room, considering the entire Smackdown crew was dealing with the same travel situation, and few were getting the push or the paychecks he was receiving. Lesnar—just two years into his WWE career—came off as a prima donna, as if he was too good to travel with the rest of the crew. In another strange move, Lesnar went out and bought himself a private jet to ease his travel burden. Lesnar put a happy face on the situation, stating that his jet would save WWE considerable travel costs and that he was trying to be a team player, but some WWE wrestlers were irked by what they saw as preferential treatment for "The Next Big Thing." Still, he would get over his unhappiness. What choice did he have? Where else would he make the kind of money he was making?

Lesnar's next eruption came during a Smackdown talent meeting. Vince McMahon instructed the crew not to leak storylines to insider newsletters or to Web sites. An angry Lesnar piped up, reportedly stating, "If I see anyone on the Internet, I'll kill them." Again, Lesnar's outburst didn't win him many fans in the locker room and further ostracized him from a number of his co-workers.

But the biggest blowup apparently came during WWE's pre-'Mania tour of South Africa. Lesnar made the trip and reluctantly faced Hardcore Holly at each stop on the tour. Lesnar was furious about



The MSG crowd had little patience for the slow-paced Lesnar-Goldberg match, even with "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin thrown into the mix as referee (above left). People couldn't wait to see Brock take a stunner (above right) and leave the ring for perhaps the final time.



Less than three years before WrestleMania XX, Lesnar was still in OVW, occasionally getting to wrestle a "big star" like Perry Saturn. Who would have guessed he'd progress so much so fast, and then be gone so quickly?

traveling across the globe and wrestling Holly, a man he perceived as a mid-card talent, a man he squashed at the Royal Rumble, and also a man who couldn't even make the WrestleMania cut.

Finally, Lesnar was informed that he was scheduled to face The Undertaker in a series of matches throughout the spring and perhaps into the summer. Lesnar reportedly was upset, feeling that a series with "The Dead Man"—with whom he had already twice feuded—would be pointless, and that 'Taker's old school character would make Lesnar look inept in the ring. It sure looked like he'd be moving down on the card, at least temporarily.

Add it all up, and it's clear that Lesnar had lost much of the passion he had for professional wrestling and was looking to get out.

CAN HE PLAY IN THE NFL?

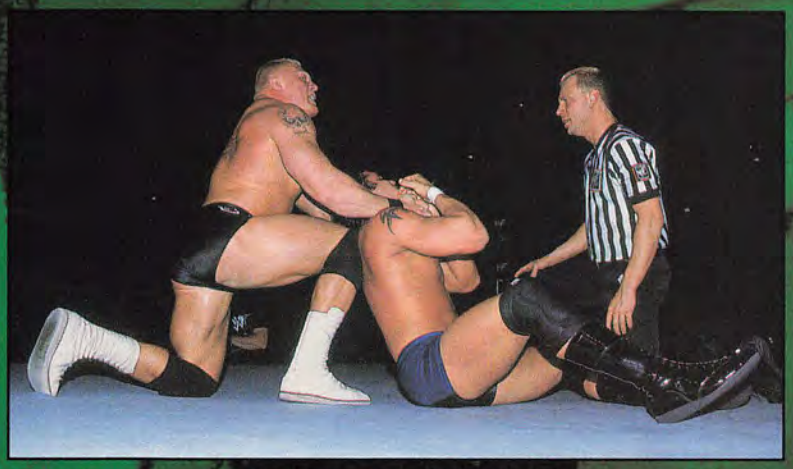
The only people who can definitively answer that question are NFL football scouts, personnel directors, general managers, and coaches, but we do know a little about Lesnar's athletic background and skills. Several colleges recruited him for football after high school (where he was an all-state player), but Lesnar focused on wrestling first and foremost. In 2000, he won the NCAA championship at the University of Minnesota. Amateur wrestling requires physical strength, stamina, balance, and speed—all assets that also come in handy in the NFL. However, football is a team sport. Lesnar would have to memorize a comprehensive playbook, work on his timing, and contribute in a team setting. And he isn't even sure what position he would play!

The Minnesota Vikings wasted little time in telling him they were *not* interested once news of his decision to leave WWE broke, although that could change in months to come. Lesnar then traveled to Arizona to begin training for NFL tryouts. According to news reports, Lesnar arrived for training weighing in at 283 pounds. He was timed at 4.65 in the 40-yard-dash, had a 35-inch vertical jump, a 10-foot standing long jump, and benched 225 pounds for 30 repetitions. If true, those are outstanding numbers, and Lesnar said he was confident they would get even better once he had been training for a few weeks.

Lesnar insists he has always wanted to try his hand at pro football, and his success in collegiate wrestling and WWE, where he improved at an amazing rate, shows he's certainly willing to work as hard as humanly possible to achieve his goals. Pro wrestling fans may question his heart after his decision to walk away from the business on such short notice, but you can't question his dedication to his craft or his work ethic.

At 26, he is still young enough to make the transition from wrestling to football. He's also willing to play virtually any position open, which makes him versatile. Lesnar also likes to point out that New England Patriot Stephen Neal is one of several athletes to make the move from NCAA wrestling to pro football, so the jump isn't unprecedented.

With all the competition from the college ranks,



Brock Lesnar vs. Randy Orton was a dark match in January 2002—two months before Lesnar's debut on WWE TV. It could have been a pay-per-view main event by 2005. Maybe it still could be.

the CFL, and Europe, we have to think Lesnar is a longshot at best to make it in the NFL. However, he certainly has a marketable name. A team might give him the benefit of the doubt just to milk the public relations advantages. That could open a few doors. If Lesnar impresses, he might just beat the odds, get signed, and win a roster spot.

The Big Show dealt Lesnar his first pinfall loss on WWE TV in November 2002. It was but a minor setback. Lesnar would soon have his revenge, and momentum was still very much on his side.

HOW MUCH MONEY WILL HE LOSE?

This is more speculation than anything, especially since Lesnar actually could earn *more* money if he signs an NFL contract and becomes a star. However, Lesnar walked away from a seven-year WWE contract worth at least $1-million per year, not counting merchandising money and pay-per-view bonuses. Considering that Lesnar was one of Smackdown's top stars and would most likely have regained the Smackdown title at some point (probably more than once) and headlined future PPVs, that merchandise could have been extremely lucrative. A *Best Of Lesnar* DVD featuring his classic matches with Kurt Angle, The Rock, and Hulk Hogan, as well as some old OVW footage, could have been a big hit as well. We're not certified accountants, but we'd have to estimate that Lesnar probably left between $10- and $15-million—spread out over the next seven years—on the table.

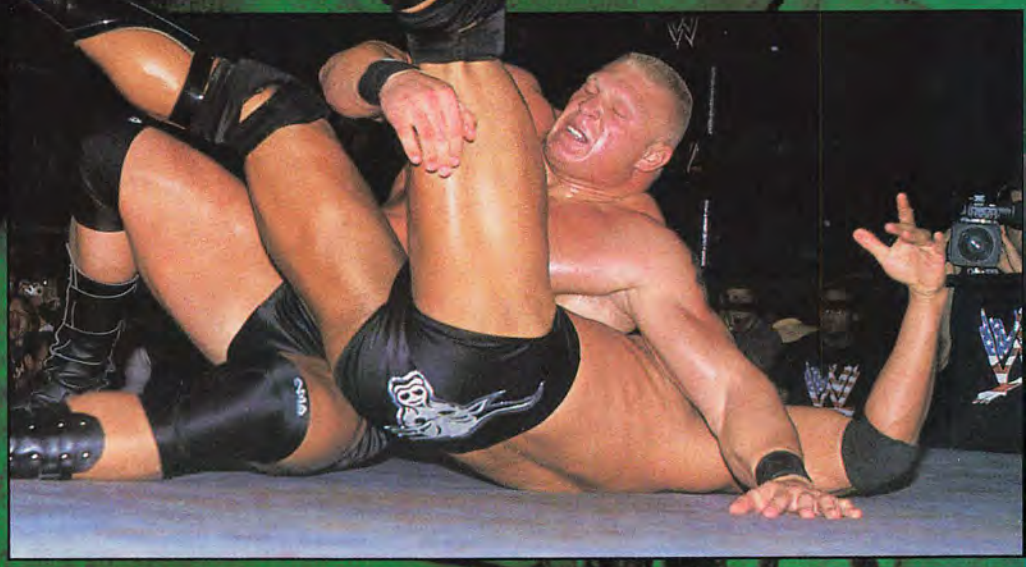
Of course, Lesnar could recoup that money if his gamble pays off in a big way. But he'd have to not just make it to the NFL, but remain in the NFL, where contracts aren't guaranteed, for a number of years and enjoy a decent amount of success. It's an awful lot of money to gamble, but he knows it.

WHO WILL STEP UP?

Lesnar's decision to split from WWE came at a bad time for the company. Kurt Angle's in-ring career is in jeopardy due to his recurring neck problems. Goldberg opted not to renew his contract. The Rock and Mick Foley are only working part-time schedules (and we might not see Rock again until 2005). Triple-H is looking to do more film work, and Steve Austin's days as an active wrestler are over.

Had Lesnar decided to stick around, he most likely would have remained one of WWE's true franchise wrestlers. However, that would have involved even more travel and personal appearances, which would only have exacerbated his situation.

With so many of the big names out of the picture, a huge void has opened in WWE. So far, Chris Benoit and Eddie Guerrero have taken advantage of that fact and positioned themselves as the top stars of Raw and Smackdown, respectively. Who else on the Smackdown side stands to gain from Lesnar's decision to leave?



Vince McMahon put all his faith in Lesnar when "The Next Big Thing" destroyed The Rock at SummerSlam 2002. His star was rising so quickly. The big push was not a mistake.

The most obvious answer is The Undertaker. UT has been around the block more than a few times, but he has proven himself to be a time-tested headliner who's still capable of delivering solid matches. Putting 'Taker in the Smackdown main event picture is a short-term solution, but it is the most obvious answer.

Chavo Guerrero Jr. is a natural feud for Eddie, much like the Owen-Bret Hart feud of 1994, but it's been done already. John Cena is another prime candidate for a main event run, especially now that he has deposed The Big Show and claimed the U.S. title. John Bradshaw Layfield, like Undertaker, is only a short-term solution, and maybe not a great one at that.

The draft lottery was a brilliant—and needed—move for WWE to counter the talent losses and allow Rob Van Dam, Booker T, and Rene Dupree to get a fresh start on Smackdown. With the proper build, any one of those men could become a main event talent. The lottery also sent Shelton Benjamin to Raw, freeing Charlie Haas to finally try his hand at singles wrestling. Haas could become U.S. champion within a year, and could be a dark horse as a Smackdown title contender further down the road.

Speaking of dark horses, Lesnar's defection might just open a door for WWE developmental talent Horshu. With his huge muscular frame, Horshu could step into the role of resident monster on Smackdown. With the proper buildup, Horshu could become the next "Next Big Thing."

For the past few years, wrestlers have complained about a glass ceiling holding them out of the main event picture. That glass ceiling is all but gone now, and almost anyone could make it to the top. It's an exciting time to be a wrestler in WWE.

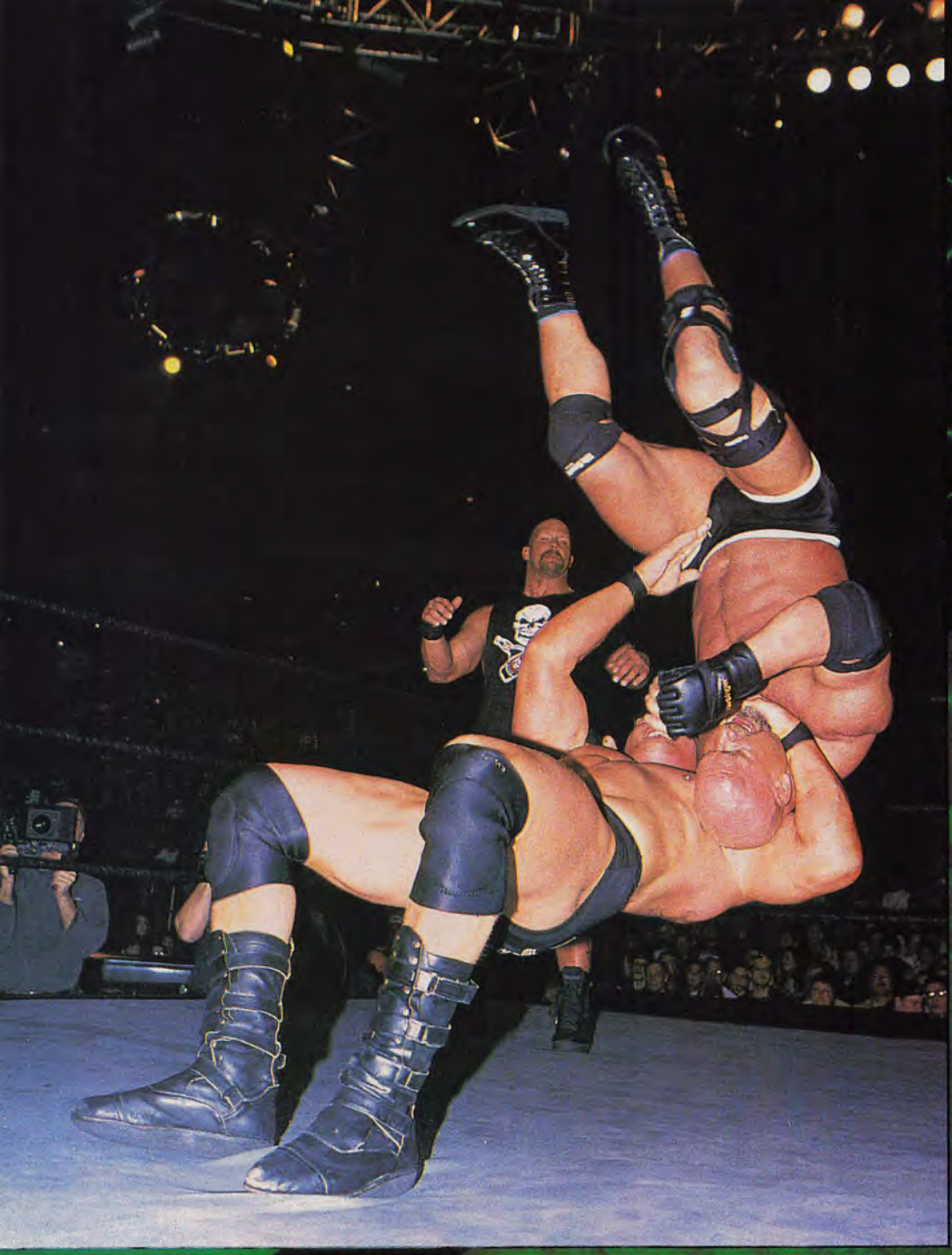
WHAT WILL HIS LEGACY BE?

As a wrestler, Lesnar was a phenom. He destroyed Hogan in an unforgettable, career-making match. He defeated The Rock in one of the best SummerSlam main events in years. His series against Angle was WWE's top feud of 2003 and yielded several Match of the Year candidates (including *PWI's* Match of the Year, the 60-minute "Ironman" match).

Lesnar made an incredible transition from the amateur mats to the squared circle. His improvement in the ring *and* on the microphone was remarkable. He was the last wrestler to hold the undisputed World title before deciding he would only defend his championship on Smackdown, forcing the creation of the Raw title.

But all of Lesnar's accomplishments in the ring are in danger of being eclipsed by his decision to leave in his prime and forego wrestling for football. At WrestleMania XX, fans were merciless with their chants of "You sold out!" and singing the goodbye song. Because of his vocal complaints and the perceived prima donna factor, Lesnar is in danger of being remembered as a quitter more than anything

Lesnar became a better wrestler as a result of his long feud with Kurt Angle last year, but he was already pretty close to Angle's level before they clashed. Will his accomplishments be overshadowed by this latest shocking development in his career?



It's true that Lesnar will be able to use a lot of the same kinds of skills he honed in wrestling to attempt to make it in the NFL. It's also true that his chances of making it are extremely slim ... and that he's walking away from millions of WWE dollars.

else. He just didn't hang around long enough.

Angle risked permanent injury—and paralysis—to face Lesnar in the main event of WrestleMania XIX. Lesnar pouted about travel schedules and booking plans and put himself before the company in announcing his resignation less than a week before WrestleMania XX. That's a study of two opposites—a man the fans might remember as the Ric Flair of his day, and a man who used wrestling to leverage a career in the NFL. If he has, indeed, wrestled his final match, history probably will not remember Lesnar fondly. But that's one big "if."

WHAT IS EVERYBODY'S REACTION?

Fans have been harsh in their condemnation of Lesnar, at WrestleMania, on Internet message boards, and on the *PWI* Hotline. Likewise, many independent wrestlers have been very critical of Lesnar's decision.

"I just don't understand the guy," said one independent wrestler who competes in the Michigan area. "I would do just about anything for a damn WWE dark match, and this guy just walks away from a long-term contract. What a slap in the face to all of us who are busting our tails just to get noticed by WWE. What a lack of respect for wrestling itself."

Fans have echoed similar comments, and Lesnar received the loudest heel reactions of the night at WM XX.

While Lesnar's actions may seem utterly incomprehensible to some wrestlers and fans, others have quietly applauded Lesnar for having the courage to follow his heart and not just go through the motions for money. Austin—a man who has walked out on WWE before—publicly supported Lesnar's decision and offered a unique perspective on his choice.

"The guy decided to make a change in his life. Why is that a mistake?" Austin said. "That's not a mistake. He's living his life the way he wants to live it. I back him 100 percent."

Austin also said, "If he chooses to come back, I believe we have a spot for him, and I believe he and Vince McMahon are on good terms."

Molly Holly and Jim Ross also publicly offered their support.

WILL HE EVER COME BACK?

This is the million-dollar question. The fact of the matter is that very few people can actually step away from wrestling for good. Roddy Piper calls it "the sickness," the addictive and intoxicating effect of getting into the ring and performing in front of a live audience. Lesnar maintains that he never really tired of wrestling itself, just the lifestyle that a WWE superstar is required to lead. And the money can be so very good.

But Lesnar felt the need to follow his dream and try out for the NFL. If he had stayed with wrestling, a day would have come when he would have looked back and regretted never giving football an honest effort. Now he's doing just that. In reality, there's something quite admirable about a man who walks away from a lucrative contract in pursuit of a dream.

Lesnar wasn't thrilled with the idea of entering into war with The Undertaker (below) for a third time after WrestleMania XX. The bad news is his departure leaves a major void in WWE. The good news is it gives John Cena (above) and a number of others a real chance to step up and fill that void.

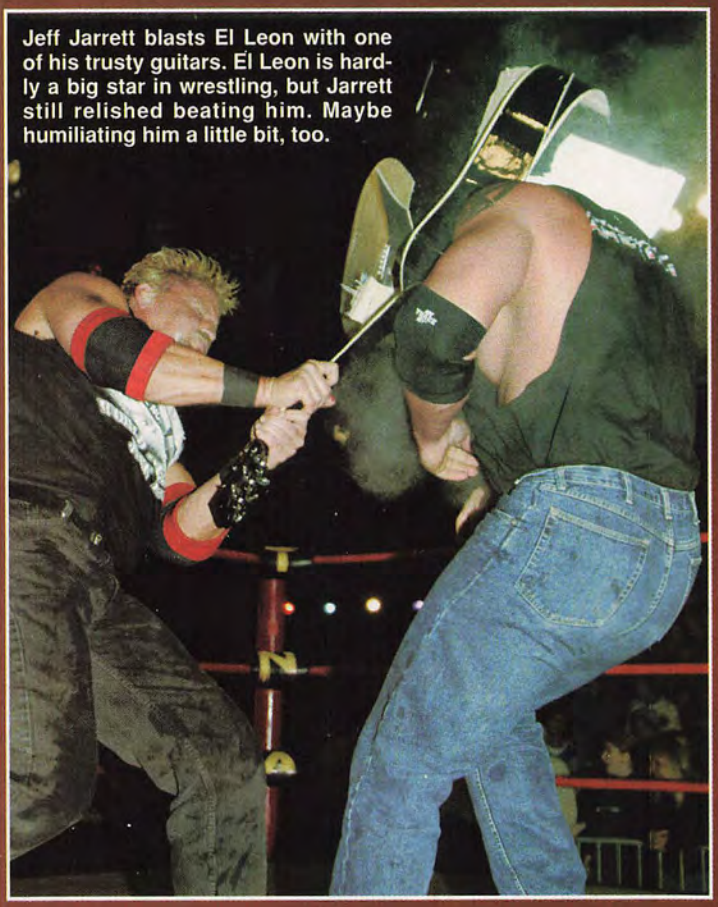
But dreams don't often pan out—that's the sad fact of the matter. What happens if Lesnar's knees can't hold up to the abrupt stops and jarring hits of the NFL? What if no one wants to gamble on a pro wrestler with no football experience beyond the high school level? Will Lesnar be willing to swallow his pride and come back to WWE? And will WWE take him?

From a business standpoint, it appears Lesnar will always have a home in WWE, if he so chooses. He left on reasonably good terms. He is a versatile wrestler who can sell tickets and PPVs, and as long as you can draw money, you'll always find a place in WWE.

But Lesnar doesn't necessarily *need* WWE. He could almost certainly get a job coaching a collegiate wrestling program, or maybe play in the CFL. Either career could offer him the stability—and easier travel schedule—for which he's looking (the money would be another story). Plus, Lesnar reportedly has a good deal of money saved up. He doesn't need to work anytime soon, but he might have to lower his standard of living a bit if he doesn't want that money to run out fast.

If WWE is willing to bend its rules and let guys like Rock and Foley work part-time schedules, we suspect it'll do the same for Lesnar. Let's face it: Lesnar's return could be a box office bonanza. If he fails, he could be a huge heel trying to go back to wrestling after flopping on the gridiron. Imagine the reaction he could get upon his return under those circumstances! If he beats the odds and succeeds, big Brock would be a mainstream celebrity who could add credibility to wrestling.

We're fairly certain we'll see Lesnar back in a WWE ring again someday—possibly in a featured match at WrestleMania XXI. Heck, Survivor Series 2004 isn't out of the question. □



Jeff Jarrett blasts El Leon with one of his trusty guitars. El Leon is hardly a big star in wrestling, but Jarrett still relished beating him. Maybe humiliating him a little bit, too.

JEFF JARRETT'S ADDICTION EXPOSED!

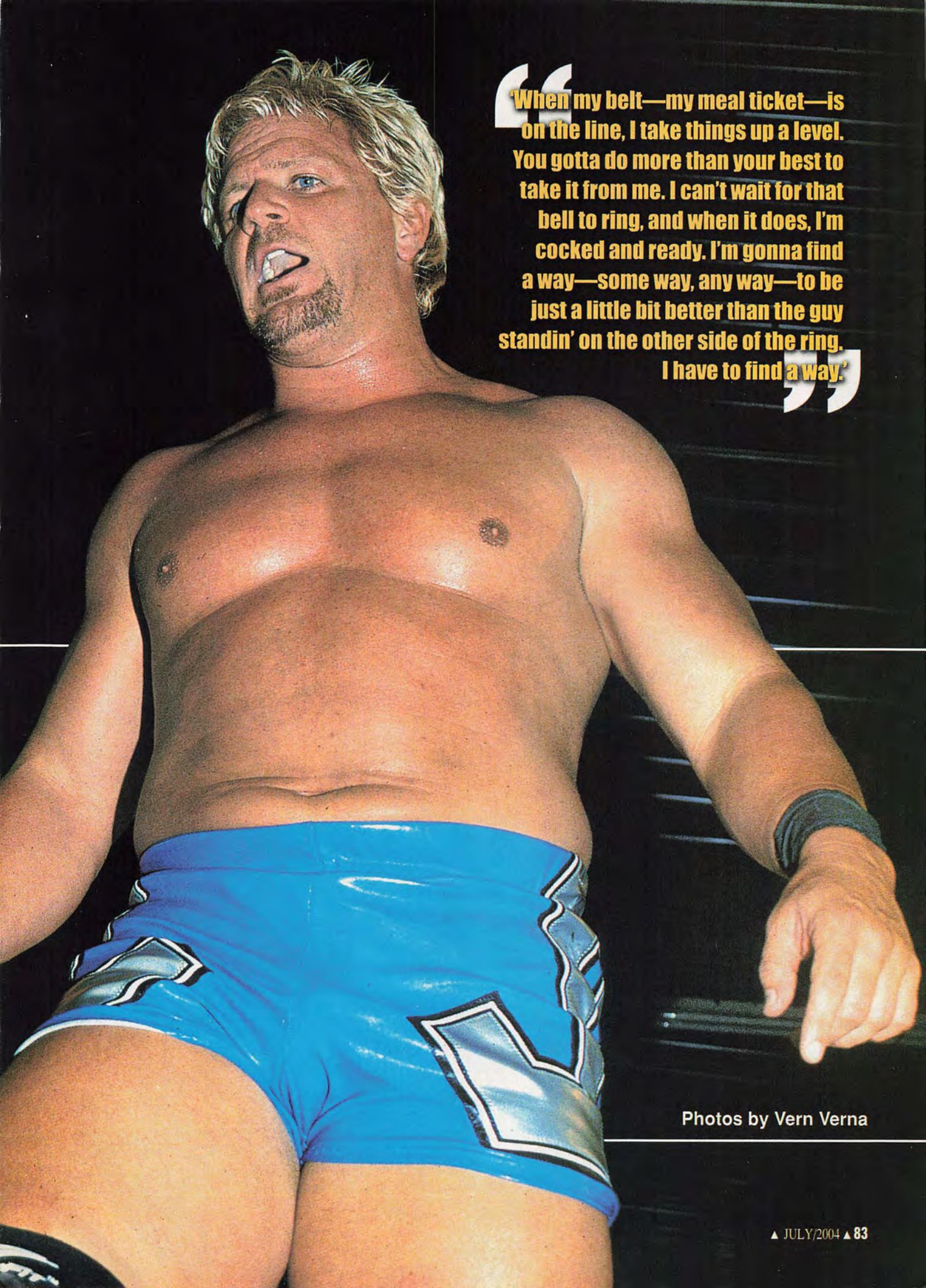
"There's No High Like Stepping Through Those Ropes"

By Jason Langin

IT'S NEVER EASY dealing with an addiction. Every day, people struggle to battle the vices that, worst-case scenario, consume their lives. Alcohol, smoking, drugs, gambling, sweets—all of these things can be addictions that are difficult to impossible for people to control and overcome. Of course, not all addictions need be overwhelmingly negative.

In the case of Jeff Jarrett, that addiction is wrestling. That's right, for all you TNA fans out there who wish Jarrett would step out of the spotlight in Nashville a little more often (or at least wonder why he doesn't), you need to accept the fact that the NWA heavyweight champion is a wrestloholic. He can't help himself.

"Of all the stuff I do or have done in this business, it's by far my greatest passion. There's no high like stepping through those ropes,"



"When my belt—my meal ticket—is on the line, I take things up a level. You gotta do more than your best to take it from me. I can't wait for that bell to ring, and when it does, I'm cocked and ready. I'm gonna find a way—some way, any way—to be just a little bit better than the guy standin' on the other side of the ring. I have to find a way."

Photos by Vern Verna

Jarrett's match with Raven last spring was easily the most anticipated in NWA-TNA history up to that point, and Jarrett delivered a grand performance. It's such matches that Jarrett truly lives for.

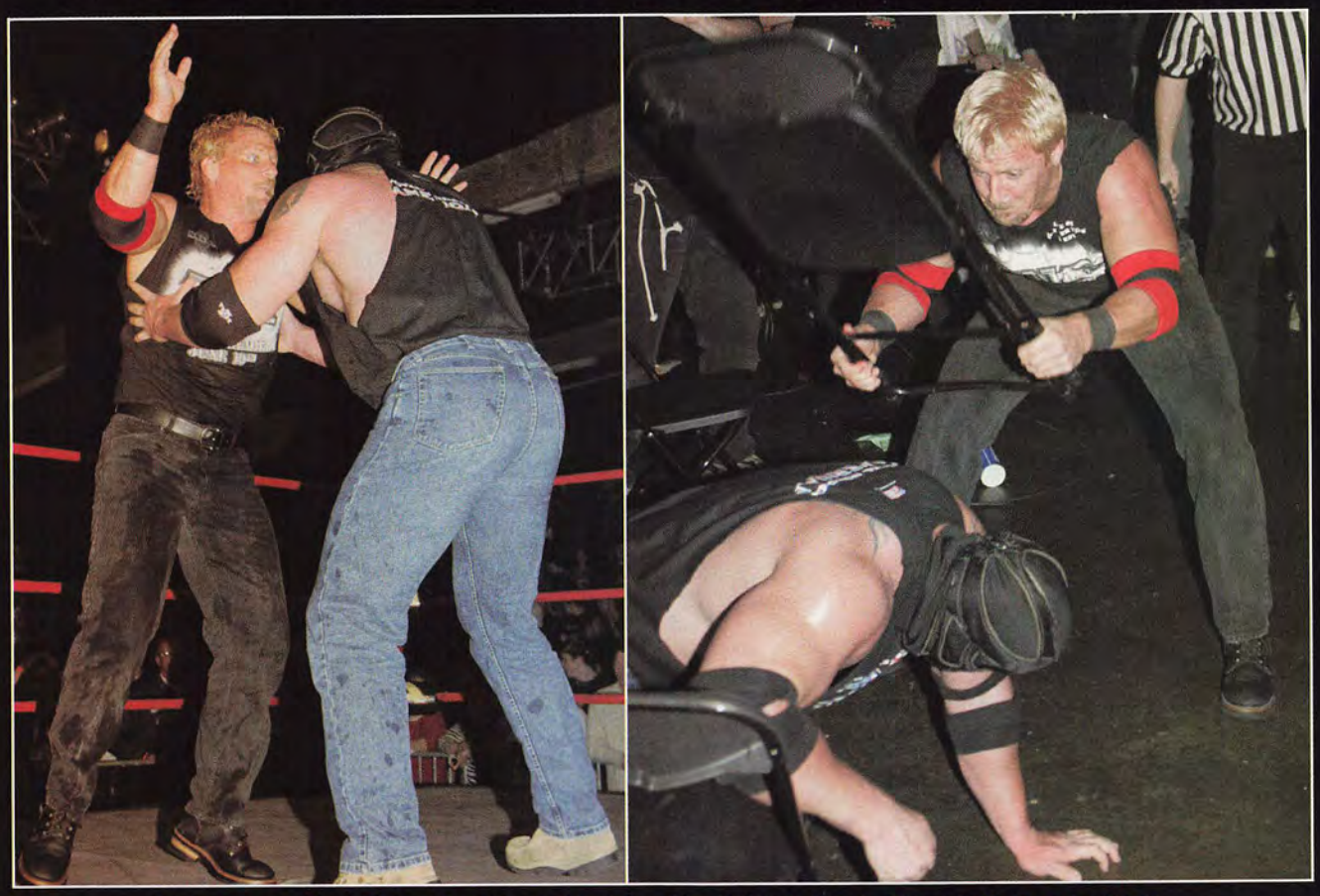
said Jarrett in a recent interview. "I've never gotten over the excitement of getting in the ring. Still get chills every time."

For 18 years now, Jarrett has been climbing into the ring to feed his addiction, and he shows no signs of quitting. It's an addiction he has zero desire to beat.

"Hard to believe he's been wrestling for that long," said fellow NWA-TNA star B.G. James. "We've had our problems lately, you know, but he's taught me a lot over the years. I'd say he's probably a better wrestler now than he was 10 years ago. Plus he's smarter. That makes him even more dangerous."

James would know better than most about Jarrett's success. When Jarrett burst into the WWF back in 1993, James was by his side as The Roadie. Although already an established star in the CWA and USWA, Jarrett had yet to enjoy success on a national level. It was in the WWF that he debuted the guitar that would become his trademark. Jarrett would go on to play that guitar (in more ways than one) to the tune of overwhelming success over the next decade.

The WCW World, WCW U.S., WWF Intercontinental, WWF European, and WWF World tag team championships are the major titles that have been wrapped around "Double-J's" waist. And

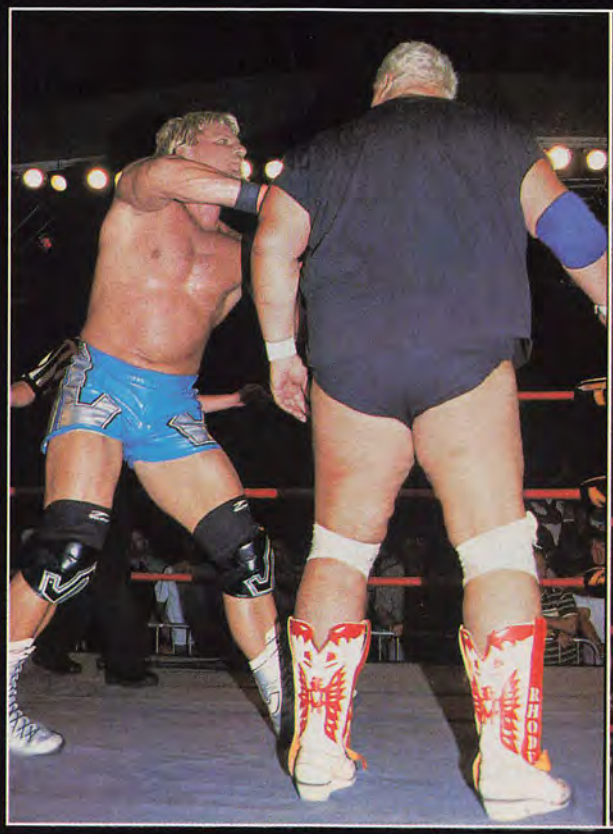


Jarrett tries to block El Leon's attempt at hoisting him high into the air (above left), then is able to drill him with a chair once the match spills outside (above right). He's never quite sure who's going to step up to challenge him next—and he kind of likes it that way.

today he wears what *he* considers the most important of all titles—the NWA championship.

"I don't really care what anyone thinks at this point in my career," said Jarrett. "To me, this is *the* belt to hold. I'm not interested in debating that issue. The NWA gold is *the* gold, and it's what drives me to be the best I can be."

Currently in his second reign as NWA champion, Jarrett has defeated some important challengers. That isn't to say he hasn't lost his share of matches or tried to duck his share of worthy contenders. That's part of the passion for him. Rile up fans, frustrate potential foes, make what happens inside the ring even more intense and exciting. Tag team matches and non-title encounters don't always go his way, but championship matches are a different story.



Dusty Rhodes has been at odds with the former "Double-J" in recent months (above left) ... and A.J. Styles still wants another piece of him (above right). They present vastly different types of challenges, but Jarrett enjoys figuring out new ways to win.

"When my belt—my meal ticket—is on the line, I take things up a level," Jarrett went on. "You gotta do more than your best to take it from me. I can't wait for that bell to ring, and when it does, I'm cocked and ready. I'm gonna find a way—some way, any way—to be just a little bit better than the guy standin' on the other side of the ring. I *have* to find a way."

Ron Killings, Curt Hennig, Christopher Daniels, Low-Ki, Elix Skipper, A.J. Styles, D-Lo Brown, Raven, Dustin Rhodes, and even Hall of Famer Dory Funk Jr. are just some of the stars that have tasted bitter defeat at Jarrett's hands (and/or guitar).

Styles, who defeated Jarrett to end his first title run, said the following of his toughest opponent: "I felt like I had all the momentum in our first match. That night I just had him figured out. But he hung back, watched how I wrestled the next few months, and got me in our next match. That's why he's so tough. He wants to be the best, and the only way to prove you are is by getting into that ring."

Jarrett has never been the biggest, strongest, or fastest wrestler, but his ring smarts put him at the head of his class no matter where he wrestles.

"I'd compare him to a guy like (four-time AWA World heavyweight champion) Nick Bockwinkel," said NWA-TNA announcer Mike Tenay, who's had a number of run-ins with the NWA champ in recent months. "He's a ring general. He can figure out any kind of opponent and wrestle virtually any style. When it's over, you're not always sure how he managed to win, but he almost always does manage to win."

Tenay's comments bring to mind Jarrett's impressive resume of titles and the men he has defeated to win them. He has beaten big men (Scott Hall), brawlers (The Godfather), technical wrestlers (Flair, Chris Benoit, Dean Malenko), and young aerialists (Edge, Styles). He adjusts his own style depending on what type of wrestler he is facing.

In NWA-TNA, this is the best type of champion to be. New stars are always appearing on the weekly pay-per-views. "I love it," said Jarrett. "I never know who might step into our ring. It keeps me on top of my game. It all gets back to the thrill and the rush of getting in the ring. It keeps me going. And that's why I'm still the champ."

And why we shouldn't expect to see Jarrett in any "Wrestlers Anonymous" meetings anytime soon. □

ECWA

2ΣT PΣRFORMANCΣ!

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS WINS THE SUPER 8 A SECOND TIME

Photos by Joe Zanolle

By Harry Burkett

EVERY INDY WRESTLER knows that if there is one event that can change his career overnight, it is the East Coast Wrestling Association's Super 8 Tournament. Super 8 victories have placed the indy spotlight on Ace Darling, Lance (Simon) Diamond, Steve Bradley, Low-Ki, Donovan Morgan, and Paul London. Other notables—including The Hardy Boyz, Scotty Too Hotty, Billy Kidman, Devon Storm (Crowbar), and Spanky—have competed in the prestigious event.

But only wrestler has earned the honor of becoming a Super 8 winner more than once. That man is Christopher Daniels. "The Fallen Angel" won the eight-man tournament in 2000 and again on April 3, 2004.

THΣ FIΣLD OF ΣIGHT

The Super 8 Tournament is known as one of the best-executed and professionally run independent shows of the entire year. Why is that? It's because promoter Jim Kettner, the driving force behind the ECWA for 37 years, begins preparing for the tournament nearly a year in advance. He watches countless hours of wrestling tapes, trying to spot the very best independent wrestlers in the business. Traditionally, those wrestlers have been cruiserweights. Kettner also tries to supply a few surprises, too, either a dark horse from beyond the Northeast corridor or even beyond the U.S. borders. Bobby Rude and Chance Beckett are among the wrestlers recruited from Canada to participate in the Super 8. The 2002 winner, Donovan Morgan, took a break from his busy schedule in Pro Wrestling NOAH to compete in the tournament.

The year 2004 was no different. Kettner took particular care in culling the best talent on the North American independent scene, with participants ranging from indy demi-gods to overlooked regional talent.

The 2004 Super 8 participants, from left to right, starting in the back row: Mike Kruel, John Walters, Austin Aries, Nicho, Shawn Daivari, Christopher Daniels, Ricky Reyes, and Rocky Romero.

Daniels waited until the final match of the tournament to break out what he calls "best moonsaults ever," a series of three, which he used to decisively defeat Aries.

As the winter turned to spring this year, Kettner finally narrowed down his field of participants. Nicho, who made his fame in this country competing as Psicosis in WCW, was invited from Mexico. Rocky Romero, who has established himself as one-half of The Havana Pit Bulls on the West Coast, eagerly accepted his invitation. Trained by Kevin Quinn and the Ballards, Romero's stated goal is to establish himself as a top junior heavyweight in New Japan someday.

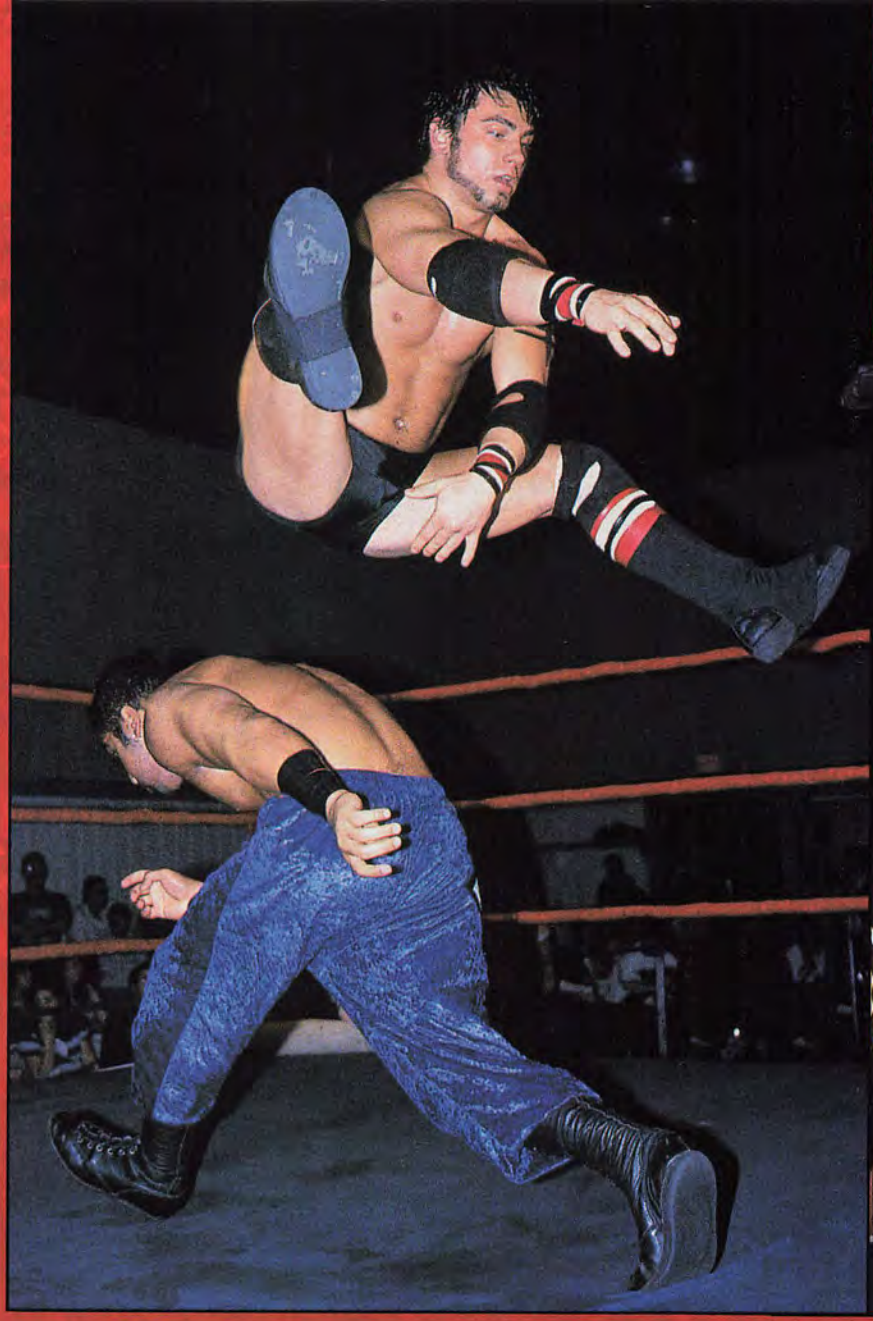
Not surprisingly, Kettner couldn't resist inviting Romero's partner, "Massacre" Ricky Reyes. Reyes also has a great appreciation for Japanese and Mexican wrestling, and has sought training from Antonio Inoki and Negro Casas. His German suplex and rolling Kimura lock would present severe challenges to his opponents in the tournament.

With the geographic mix still a consideration, John Walters was an easy choice. Trained at Killer Kowalski's school in Massachusetts, Walters first gained prominence through feuds with Luis Ortiz and Vince Vicallo in Chaotic Wrestling. His next stop was Ring of Honor, where he has feuded with Xavier. He would be among the favorites to win the tournament.

Because he lost his mask and his very identity in a stipulation match, Nicho may not have had the most famous name at the event, but he was easily the most famous man in the tourney. A staple of *WCW Monday Nitro* and *Thunder* for several years, Nicho would present a veteran challenge for the other athletes.

Mike Kruel was an unconventional choice for the Super 8, mainly because the ECWA champion traditionally defends his title on the show. Not this year. "The Shooter" insisted on a spot, and the tournament would certainly be more exciting as a result.

It isn't surprising that Austin Aries considers Chris Benoit one of his inspirations. The Milwaukee native bears a striking resemblance to the WWE Raw champion in terms of looks and style. Trained by Eddie Sharkey, Aries



Aries and Daivari both went high into the air a few times during their opening round showdown (left). Aries got the win after Daivari attempted his outrageous finisher a bit prematurely. Meanwhile, Daniels saw to it that Rocky Romero became the second of the two Havana Pit Bulls to exit in the quarterfinals (below).

has become a top indy star, made appearances in WWE and NWA-TNA, and become a regular competitor in Ring of Honor.

Kettner did have one disappointment in his recruitment efforts, though. Tyson Dux, one of his first choices, was injured at a *Velocity* taping and wouldn't be able to participate. Instead, Kettner found a standout from the Midwest, Shawn Daivari, a protege of Sharkey and Sheik Adnan Al-Kaissie. Daivari, who is of Arab descent, delights crowds by bringing his "magic carpet" to the ring. It makes for the perfect prop when delivering his patented magic carpet ride from the top rope.

That left one more spot for Kettner to fill. He wanted the perfect indy wrestler. So is it any wonder that he selected Christopher Daniels? Often cited as the consummate professional on the indy circuit, Daniels would no doubt lend credibility and a considerable depth of experience to the tournament.

THE NIGHT OF THE SUPER 8

James J. Dillon, former manager of the legendary Four Horsemen, kicked off the festivities at St. Matthew's Parish Center in Wilmington, Delaware, by commenting on his 20-year relationship with Jim Kettner. He also complimented the outstanding field of participants and mentioned how much the Super 8 has meant to the industry. After all eight wrestlers were introduced, the tournament was underway.

In the first bout of the opening round, Austin Aries faced Shawn Daivari. Neither wrestler was particularly well-known by the St. Matthew's crowd, but the two men quickly gained the fans' respect. Daivari might have been too anxious to show off his exotic finishing move, a flying double-legdrop with his "magic carpet" underneath. Aries rolled out of the way and capitalized with his finisher, the 450 splash. Aries advanced to the semifinals.

SUPER 8 CONTROVERSY!
IS *TWO* TOO MANY?

ECWA promoter Jim Kettner often states he is proud that most Super 8 Tournaments are free of controversy: no foreign objects, no outside interference, and no questionable officiating. But that didn't prevent some people from complaining when the Super 8 was over.

The issue? Christopher Daniels is now a *two*-time Super 8 winner. Did the independent circuit's most decorated wrestler need yet another accolade? Even before the tournament, some asserted Daniels was "wasting a spot" in the Super 8 because a hungry newcomer in need of a career break could have received that opportunity. When Daniels actually won the tourney, those complaints became considerably louder.

Actually, several wrestlers have participated in the tournament on more than one occasion. Daniels has competed three times, while Spanky, Jeff Peterson, Ace Darling, Lance (Simon) Diamond, Reckless Youth, and Inferno all competed twice.

After this year's Super 8, Daniels shrugged off the controversy during an interview with ECWA's Web site. "Well, I think a lot of people, when they first announced that I was part of the tournament, they thought that it might have been just a wasted spot, like I didn't need it, I didn't need the tournament again, I didn't need to be a part of this. But the truth of the matter is I felt like I had something to prove to myself, that I could still go out there and perform. I feel like the Super 8 is where I made my name ... It's one of the most prestigious honors I've ever had a pleasure of being a part of, and it just means the world to me tonight."

Celebrating the first Super 8 triumph in 2000!

—*Harry Burkett*

ECWA champion Mike Kruel solidified his shoot-style image by steamrolling Ricky Reyes. Reyes tapped out after only a few minutes. It was the only lopsided match of the night. Fans were disappointed at the quality of the match, considering that Reyes didn't get a chance to showcase his Japanese-style offense, but they supported Kruel nonetheless. With his father, former Northeast wrestler Bodyguard for Hire, cheering him on from the audience, Kruel would have something to prove in the semifinals.

Nicho hadn't shed his famous mask when he applied a half-Boston crab on Walters in the opening round. It didn't matter. Walters, one of the favorites to win it all, would soon eliminate him.

Christopher Daniels' encounter with Rocky Romero was the exact opposite of the Kruel-Reyes bout. The match was evenly fought, with Daniels and Romero sparring in the Japanese style. Romero's jumping knee kick was particularly devastating, but Daniels countered that high-impact offense with effective chain wrestling. By pinning Romero in such a tough match, Daniels seemed to have as much momentum as Kruel going into the next round.

Was it a metaphorical shedding of his old identity? It seemed to be when Nicho, who wore his old Psicosis outfit to the ring, opted to take off both the mask and chest protector midway through his match with John Walters. It was definitely a clash of styles, as Walters made considerable effort to use his heavy-hitting and more grounded repertoire against Nicho, who spent more time snapping off the ropes. When Walters finally succeeded in pinning the internationally renowned Nicho, it made him seem like the tournament favorite all the more.

Next came the semifinals. Four men—Aries, Kruel, Daniels, and Walters—would be vying for the Super 8 prize.

ECWA champion Kruel faced former titleholder Daniels in the first match. It seemed almost like poetic justice when Kruel, who had completely dominated Reyes in the opening round, fell victim to Daniels' own submission-based attack. Chants of "You tapped out!" reverberated throughout St. Matthew's Parish Center after Daniels forced Kruel into submission with his trademark Angel wings finisher. Kruel, in an unprecedented act of sportsmanship, acknowledged that Daniels was the better man and

handed over his the ECWA title belt. Although it was a non-title bout, ECWA officials didn't prevent Kruel from giving Daniels the championship.

By the time the bell rang for the next match, many ECWA fans were comparing Austin Aries to 2003's underdog participant, Chance Beckett, who made it all the way to the finals. Considering how the Super 8 often foils the best predictions, no one knew what would happen when Walters, previously recognized as the favorite, faced off against the dark horse from Wisconsin. As it turned out, Aries surprised Walters with a 450 splash, the same move he used to defeat Daivari earlier, to win the match.

The final was set. Daniels, considered by many to be the indy circuit's top wrestler, would face Aries, a virtual unknown in the Northeast. Would Daniels enhance his reputation as perhaps the best non-WWE wrestler in the business? Or would a new star be born?

Daniels exhibited the same patience and presence of mind against Aries as he had against Kruel and Romero. Aries kept pace with "The Fallen Angel" brilliantly, routinely finding escapes and sometimes counters to Daniels' best maneuvers. Aries kicked out from every suplex and pin attempt; Daniels did the same. In fact, there were more near-falls in this encounter than any other match. Ultimately, though, Daniels dug down deep to find and found the energy to execute three consecutive moonsaults. After that impressive flurry, Daniels easily covered Aries for the three-count.

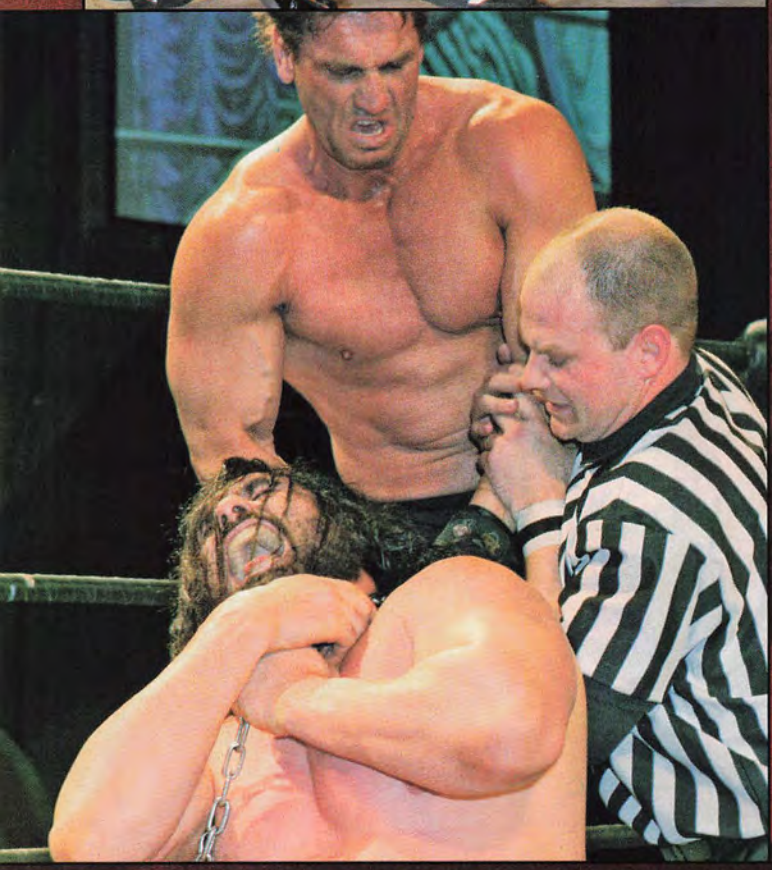
THE THRILL OF VICTORY

"I want to thank Austin for putting on such a hell of a performance in his three matches, and he really brought it to me in the final match. And I think he's really made a name for himself tonight. I expect nothing but great things from him. He's a hell of wrestler, a hell of a student. I also want to say thank you to all of the fans. The reaction that I got tonight after I won, I would've cried if I hadn't spent all the liquid in my body sweating it out. But it really was emotional for me, to be in that ring, to hear those fans, and to win this trophy for a second time."

Those were the heartfelt comments that Super 8 winner Christopher Daniels offered in an interview with ECWA's Web site later that night. For so many wrestlers, the thrill of victory is so hard to put into words. But on this night, Daniels articulately expressed the emotion of the evening. For him, the 2004 Super 8 had confirmed his own unique place in the wrestling business ... and in the hearts of so many fans. □

An over-the-knee backbreaker from Kruel caused Daniels considerable pain (above left), but he's well-aware of how to pace himself in a long tournament. He won the match and saw Kruel hand him his ECWA title belt as a result. Meanwhile, Aries did what many considered the unexpected—he took out Walters in the semis in the biggest win of his career (above right).

As Ken Shamrock battled Predator in a brutal UPW contest (left), he had to still have Tank Abbott (right) on his mind. Abbott stirred up trouble by sitting in the crowd during the show. But Shamrock was the one who cut a promo on Abbott!



Just about everyone who saw Shamrock in action in UPW that night was talking about what happened between him and Abbott, which was a shame because Shamrock-Predator was exciting.

Tank Abbott Explains His Rage Against Shamrock:

But we're not buying it!

By Dan Murphy

YOU HAVE TO feel badly for Predator.

The man once known as Sylvester Terkay had a shot against former WWF Intercontinental champion Ken Shamrock in a featured match at the California-based UPW's big fifth anniversary card this winter. Predator had a cherry spot on a card packed with big names, including Scott Hall, Kevin Nash, Ivory, Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka, and Christopher Daniels. It was an opportunity for the 307-pound former WWE developmental wrestler to make his mark against a man who has worn gold in the WWF, NWA, and the UFC.

But even though Predator wrestled Shamrock to a double-disqualification, few people who saw it remember the result. Everyone was talking about Shamrock vs. Tank Abbott after Shamrock unexpectedly started a feud with his fellow UFC veteran.

About 1,500 fans packed the building for the biggest show in the promotion's history at The Grove in Anaheim, California. Abbott was among those fans, and was enjoying the show with a group of friends.

Apparently, word of Abbott's presence got back to Shamrock. When "The World's Most Dangerous Man" came out for his match against Predator, he cut an off-the-cuff promo on Abbott, challenging him to a UFC bout to take place in July. Shamrock insinuated that Abbott was afraid to face him.

Photos by Jan Sanders

> "Abbott actually led the fans in chanting his name, a move that absolutely reeks of self-promotion. If Abbott just wanted to get his hands on Shamrock, it seems odd that he would have the presence of mind to play up to the crowd. When you're acting on pure adrenaline in a fighting situation, you are rarely aware of your surroundings."

Shamrock barely kicked out of a pinfall attempt at one point (above) ... and Predator barely made it to the ropes to break Shamrock's anklelock at another (right). It ended in a double-disqualification, but there hasn't been much talk about a rematch.

To say Abbott was upset is like saying Donald Trump has a bit of an ego. Abbott was enraged and tried to force his way into the ring. Security managed to restrain him and finally forced him out an emergency exit. But Abbott wasn't finished. He tried to bust his way back in through another emergency exit, screaming obscenities and threats at Shamrock.

Abbott certainly didn't do Predator any favors, as the crowd began chanting "Ab-bott! Ab-bott!" and the altercation completely overshadowed the Predator-Shamrock bout.

But why did Abbott lose his cool and go absolutely ballistic over a relatively harmless promo? After competing in UFC and WCW, you'd think Abbott would be able to take trash-talking in stride. We contacted Abbott by phone and asked him to tell us his side of the story. After making several derogatory comments about Shamrock and his immediate family, he gave his explanation.

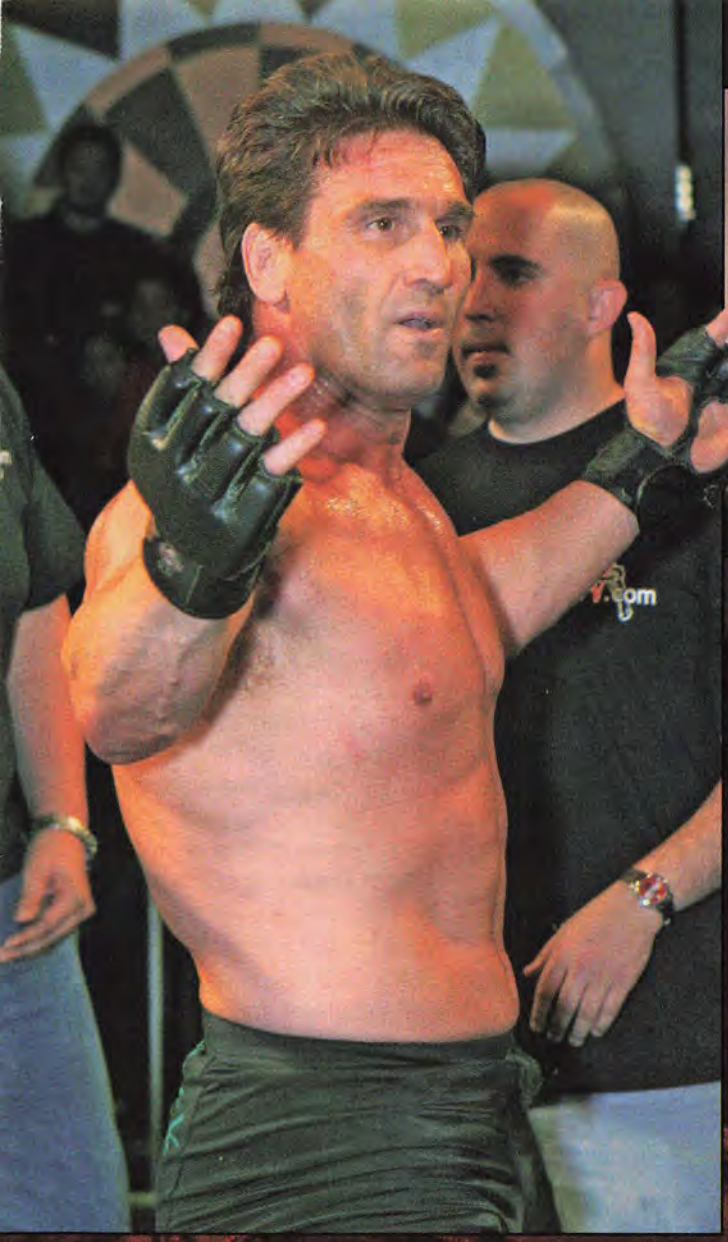
"I was at that show as a fan, just sitting there minding my own business," he said. "And here comes Shamrock, a guy who's never given me the respect I deserve. I've been in private with Shamrock dozens of times and he's never said a cross word to me. Hell, usually he's afraid to look me in the eye. But this time he starts talking smack because he's got security to protect him, and what am I supposed to do? Am I supposed to sit there and take it? I'm not gonna let anyone make a fool out of me. He tried to use me to get a big payday in UFC. I'm not about the money. If he wanted to go, I was ready to go right then and there, but he didn't want any of me.

"Shamrock likes to act like he's a big superstar wrestler when the fact of the matter is that he couldn't carry my jockstrap," Abbott continued. "The fact is, he couldn't last 30 seconds with me, and he knows it."

Those are about the only words Abbott spoke that we could print in a family magazine, but his point was that Shamrock instigated the whole episode and that Abbott was merely calling Shamrock's bluff. He also claims Shamrock received preferential treatment as a pro wrestler, while he refuses to suck up to promoters.

We don't buy it.

Not that we really want to get on Abbott's bad



Could Shamrock (left) have been in on these strange shenanigans? He's not saying, but it seems unlikely. As for Abbott (above), we think we understand his true motives ... but we aren't sure.

side, but we just can't believe he was more or less an innocent bystander in this mess.

Okay, Abbott hails from Huntington Beach, California, so we can accept that he attended the show simply because it was close to home. But usually when a wrestler goes to a card as a spectator, he sits in the locker room, for two reasons: to talk to the other wrestlers, and so as not to serve as a distraction. For a recognizable wrestler to sit in a prominent spot in plain view of fans is a major breach of wrestling etiquette. In fact, in some locker rooms, that's enough to start a fight in and of itself.

Another curious thing is that Abbott actually led the fans in chanting his name, a move that absolutely reeks of self-promotion. If Abbott just wanted to get his hands on Shamrock, it seems odd that he would have the presence of mind to play up to the crowd. When you're acting on pure adrenaline in a fighting situation, you are rarely aware of your surroundings. You're certainly not playing to the cheap seats.

And how is this for a coincidence: UFC ring announcer Bruce Buffer was the guest announcer for the bout. That may not be a huge surprise when you consider both Shamrock and Predator have shoot-fighting experience and the match had a strong UFC-style feel. But the day after the altercation went down, Buffer posted his spin on the confrontation on the Internet, hyping an Abbott-Shamrock bout as a "historic war."

Buffer sure moved fast in getting the hype out there for a match that supposedly came out of nowhere and had yet to be signed. It all seems rather suspicious to us.

Maybe these are all coincidences and this is groundless speculation, but when you add up that many coincidences, you have to start wondering.

Abbott was once one of UFC's top draws and had an incredible knockout punch. However, he eventually was exposed as a one-dimensional fighter. After several embarrassing losses, his stock plummeted. Shamrock, on the other hand, remains one of UFC's most marketable names. A fight between Abbott and Shamrock could be a big UFC draw, as it could interest wrestling fans familiar with Abbott and Shamrock from their wrestling careers. Abbott would stand to make a considerable sum of money from the fight, as would Shamrock.

It looks to us like Abbott orchestrated the whole thing in an effort to secure a big-money fight, or at least to get his name back out there and land him some wrestling bookings. Was Shamrock in on it? That's not as clear-cut, as he could have more to lose than to gain by fighting Abbott, which makes us think his actions might not have been premeditated. But we're not sure.

In any case, Predator and UPW couldn't be happy about a potential UFC showdown stealing the attention from their card. And they have Abbott to thank for it. □

the business page

By Harry Burkett

Vince McMahon is very excited about the concept of video-on-demand and how he's going to be applying it to wrestling. You'll be able to see not only classic WWE footage at your convenience, but classic matches going all the way back to the 1950s!

WWE around the clock... Only a couple of issues ago, we reported on the potential audience for a 24-hour wrestling network, citing the big blocks of mat programming on the Sunshine Network and the success of Europe's Wrestling Channel and Japan's Samurai TV. We also noted that WWE must have something similar in mind because it has purchased the video libraries of WCW, ECW, the AWA, and Jim Crockett Promotions during the past few years.

Now we have more information on Vince McMahon's plan: It's called WWE 24/7. That's right, it is wrestling action 24 hours a day and, better yet, it isn't just WWE footage. McMahon wants to cover the scope of professional wrestling with this network, ranging from the 1950s heyday of Antonino Rocca and Haystacks Calhoun to the Monday night wars of the 1990s. WWE's vault is now bursting with 75,000 hours of video content.

Keep in mind, however, that WWE 24/7 won't be just a few channels up from ESPN or TV Land on your basic cable or satellite service. It will be made possible by video-on-demand, much like the *WWE Fanatic* series was released on direct pay-per-view. The current plan is to make 20 hours of content available per month, which will include about four to five hours of fresh programming per week.

WWE Chairman Vince McMahon and his wife, CEO Linda McMahon, made the announcement on March 24 at a press luncheon in New York City. "A lot of these stars our fans have not seen in a long time, or have never seen before," Vince told Reuters. "Now they are going to come to life again."

In reality, we might never see a 24-hour wrestling network on our basic cable systems. Right now, video-on-demand is competing with DVDs, which have exploded onto the market in recent years. Unfortunately for those trying to turn profits, the pricing power for DVDs is rather low, almost as low as VHS videocassettes. Entertainment analysts are hailing video-on-demand as the future because there is no

software to manufacture, no inventories to store, and no returns to estimate. Some also believe that video-on-demand has the potential to fully replace the syndication market, which has been on the wane for the past 15 years.

Also of interest, McMahon says profits from the vintage footage will be shared with the retired wrestlers in the videos. "This is a brand new toy chest, and we are going to open it," he added. "The merchandising and licensing opportunity is enormous."

It sounds as if even disgruntled former WWE superstars had better stay in Vince's good graces to get a piece of the action.

The Rock makes the rounds ... For those fans who miss The Rock on WWE television, you certainly had a chance to catch "The Great One" in numerous media appearances in late-March and early-April, as he made a publicity tour for his latest movie, *Walking Tall.* Because The Rock has done so many interviews and answered so many questions, he rarely says anything that diehard fans don't already know.

But here are a few granules of new information. During an appearance on Howard Stern's radio show on April 2, he confirmed that he now owns "The Rock" name. He said the conversation with Vince McMahon to gain ownership of the moniker was "easy." He confirmed that he likes being called *The* Rock, not just Rock. When Stern asked about the body art he wears to display his Samoan heritage, The Rock said it took about an hour to airbrush the tattoos before filming.

During an appearance on *Ellen,* host Ellen DeGeneres asked The Rock how his wife, Dany, felt about his first love scene in *Walking Tall.* The Rock said Dany watched the movie in a private screening with family and friends. Dany didn't *say* anything about the scene—but responded with a hard smack on the back of The Rock's head. *Walking Tall* was released nationwide on April 2.

An overprotective "Hulkster"? Now that Backstreet Boys manager Lou Pearlman has taken on Brooke Hogan as his latest client, Hulk Hogan says that he's having a difficult time getting accustomed to his 15-year-old daughter's growing fame. All eyes were on Hulk when he recently accompanied Brooke—an aspiring pop singer—to a performance in Orlando.

"I got a problem," Hogan revealed to the *New York Daily News.* "She's 15 and beautiful ... The way she runs around during the day is perfect ... But when you put stage makeup on these young kids, she's perceived as being older, so we have these 22-year-old guys calling."

Added Hogan, "I tell them, 'She's not old enough to date yet. Yes, you're 22, yes, you have a nice Corvette, but she's 15! There's nothing to talk about!'"

Maybe Hogan should be thankful. At least Brooke didn't demand to be a wrestling valet!

Photo By Michael Cairns

Brooke Hogan—Hulk's daughter—is a beautiful 15-year-old with a wonderful voice that could make her a huge pop music star. Her father is a little concerned about her growing up too fast, though.

WWE Stockwatch

(For the period of March 1 to March 31, 2004)

30-Day High: 14.48 on March 31
30-Day Low: 12.35 on March 16
52-Week High: 14.48 on March 31, 2004
52-Week Low: 7.43 on April 10, 2003

Up, up, and away! WWE stock is on the rebound, exhibiting solid growth since late-December, rising from 12.50 to 14.48. While short-term investors—most notably day traders—haven't been able to make much of a profit on this slow growth, the steadiness of the rise has been reassuring to long-term investors who don't like volatility. On March 8, WWE announced third-quarter earnings of 13 cents per share, quite a switch from the 22-cent loss experienced during the same quarter last year.

The success of WrestleMania XX had a positive effect on WWE stock. WrestleMania XX was the highest-grossing event ever held at New York's Madison Square Garden, with more than $2.4-million in ticket sales, surpassing Survivor Series 2002, which grossed $1.25-million. Even more importantly, with an increase in price from $39.95 to $49.95, 'Mania was also the highest-grossing event in pay-per-view history, with gross revenues estimated to be between $40- and $45-million. WWE had hopes that "Mania would exceed one million PPV buys, but it appears that it will fall just short.

Also, WWE has tentatively added two more brand-exclusive pay-per-views to its 2004 calendar, including its first Tuesday night PPV in 12 years, a Raw event scheduled for October 19.

TV breakdown

RAW (Spike TV)

March 15: 3.9
March 22: 4.5
March 29: 4.3
April 5: 3.8

Analysis: For some time, it has been clear that *Raw* no longer benefits much from the "after PPV" effect, a phenomenon that boosted the program's ratings significantly during the wrestling boom. With Internet and hotline reports and WWE's secondary shows, there are plenty of opportunities for fans to find out what happened at the pay-per-view and its immediate aftermath. Still, the March 15 edition of *Raw,* the night after WrestleMania XX, was consistent with higher ratings as of late. In fact, the lottery draft held a week *later* boosted *Raw* to a 4.5, its highest rating since its April 22, 2002, program, which drew a 4.8. *Raw* kept most of that momentum the following week with a 4.3, but dropped closer to normal levels by April 5. Nevertheless, it must be a relief for Vince McMahon to know that a potentially larger audience is at least out there, given the right circumstances.

SMACKDOWN (UPN)

March 11: 3.1
March 18: 3.6
March 25: 3.3
April 1: 3.2

Analysis: Interestingly, *Smackdown* received a bigger bounce from WrestleMania XX than *Raw,* a full four days after the event. Of course, there was interest surrounding WWE Smackdown champion Eddie Guerrero's victory over Kurt Angle, and John Cena's U.S. title win over The Big Show, at WrestleMania. And maybe fans wanted to see what the Smackdown stars' reaction to the scheduling of the lottery would be. But the rating also probably had something to do with Paul Heyman's gauntlet series for a Smackdown title shot, which resulted in Shelton Benjamin vs. Charlie Haas, Benjamin vs. Billy Gunn, Benjamin vs. Rey Misterio Jr., and, in the end, Smackdown champ Guerrero vs. Misterio. On the other hand, the lottery draft didn't have much of an impact on the next *Smackdown,* which drew a typical rating of 3.3. Obviously, the lottery draft—in and of itself—isn't the answer to raising *Smackdown's* numbers.

VELOCITY (Spike TV)

March 13: 0.9
March 20: 0.9
March 27: 0.8
April 3: 0.8

Analysis: Judging from the numbers, *Velocity* benefits from habitual viewing, meaning that its ratings don't necessarily depend on what happens on *Smackdown* earlier in the week. Either you watch WWE wrestling on Saturday nights, or you don't. *Velocity's* ratings have been fairly consistent for several months, especially since late-December, when the show settled into a rating of 0.8 or 0.9 each week. Bill DeMott continues to provide insightful analysis, on par with Pat Patterson in the early-1980s.

CONFIDENTIAL (Spike TV)

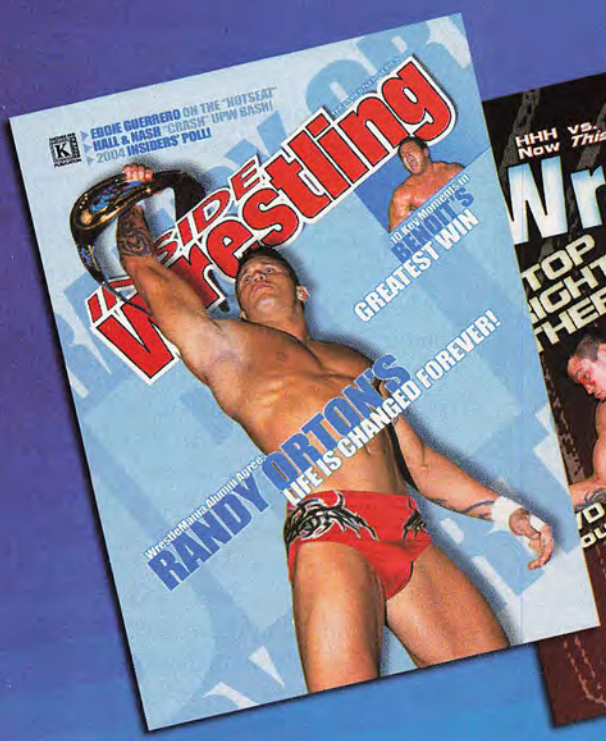
March 13: 0.7
March 20: 0.8
March 27: 0.8
April 3: 0.5

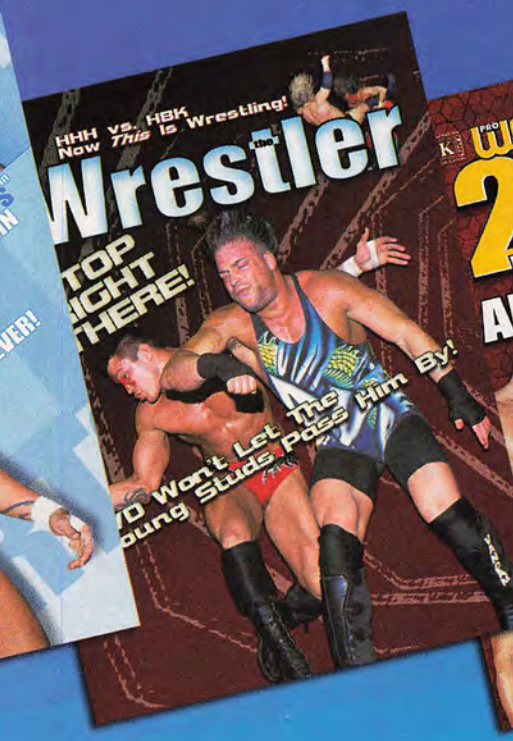
Analysis: The April 3 edition of *Confidential* epitomized what's wrong with the program. Whenever *Confidential* delves into wrestling's history with truly classic matches—in this case, Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart inside a steel cage at SummerSlam 1994—or interviews with former superstars, viewer response tends to be positive. But The Rock plugging his latest movie, behind-the-scenes coverage of a Chris Benoit photo shoot, and Linda McMahon accepting awards on behalf of WWE are ratings killers.

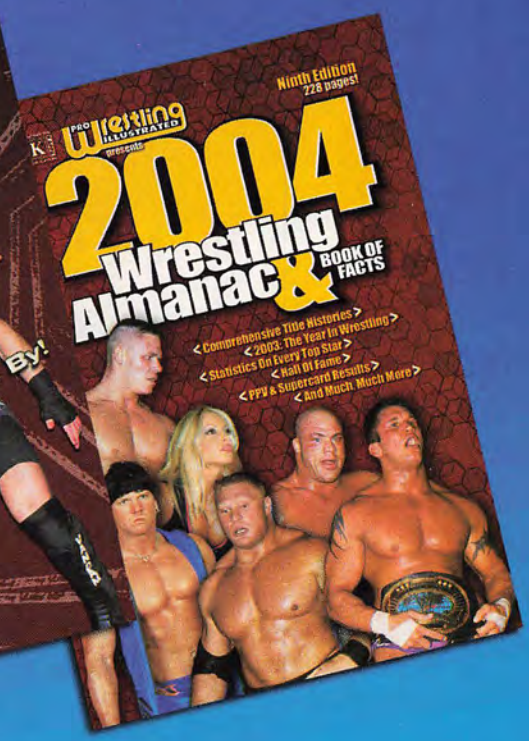
SUNDAY NIGHT HEAT (Spike TV)

March 14: 0.8
March 21: 1.1
March 28: 1.0
April 4: 0.9

Analysis: Again, the lottery draft had more of an effect on ratings than WrestleMania XX in the month of March. Perhaps anticipation of the lottery draft is what allowed *Sunday Night Heat* to score a 1.1, while the WrestleMania countdown show—airing the previous week at a special time of 6 p.m. Eastern—garnered only a 0.8. It's difficult to believe that *Heat* isn't suffering from the cocky broadcast team of Jonathan Coachman and Al Snow, who continue to try much too hard to be funny.







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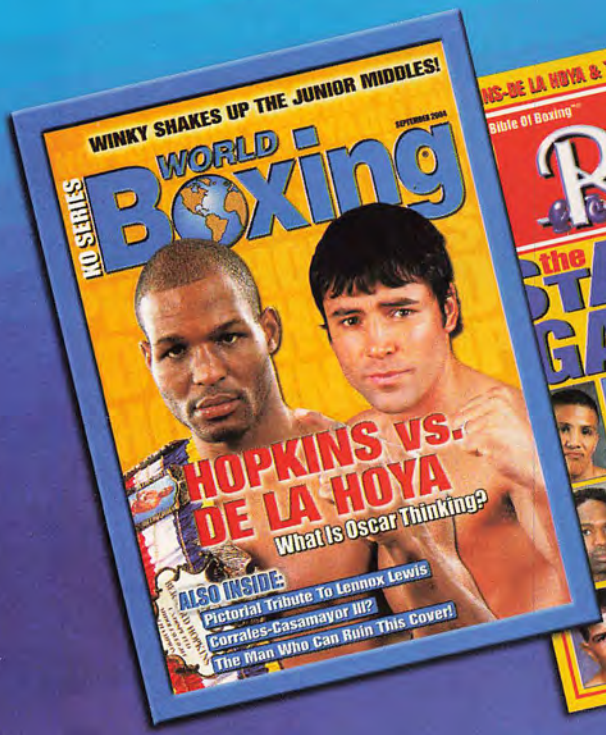

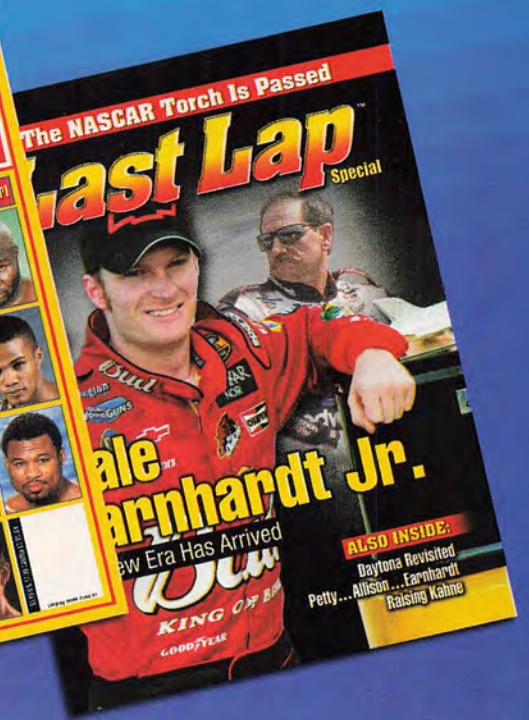

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the steel cage

By Liz Hunter

A LETHAL LOTTERY. I was stunned when Vince McMahon announced that WWE would be holding a talent draft only two years into the brand extension. Sure, I understand the reasoning. WWE's two biggest stars, Bill Goldberg and Brock Lesnar, were leaving the company, plus Kurt Angle was having neck problems again, and McMahon figured that staging a draft just after WrestleMania XX made perfect sense.

It was a terrible idea. Raw and Smackdown had just begun to gel as separate brands. I had begun to think of Triple-H as a Raw wrestler and Kurt Angle as a Smackdown wrestler. Differing philosophies had begun to emerge, with Raw being a more sensationalistic and volatile brand, and Smackdown placing more of an emphasis on athletic competition. But, as evidenced by the dual reigns of Raw champion Chris Benoit and Smackdown champion Eddie Guerrero, McMahon is dedicated to achieving parity between the two brands more than anything else.

Technical wrestling is hot right now, and what works for Smackdown should work for Raw, right? Raw's roster is superior to Smackdown's, so let's hold a lottery to level the playing field, right? Raw has a vindictive and egomaniacal general manager, so Smackdown has to have one, too, right?

Rhyno got a shot at the Raw title on the very night he was drafted away from Smackdown in the lottery. Unfortunately, he didn't make the most of his opportunity against Chris Benoit. Liz Hunter thought the entire lottery concept was a big mistake.

All of this defeats the purpose of separate brands. Fans want choices. If fans don't buy the notion of Kane being nearly decapitated in a limousine, they can tune in to *Smackdown* to watch a scintillating cruiserweight battle between Rey Misterio Jr. and Ultimo Dragon. If fans tire of Eddie Guerrero trading go-behind switches with Kurt Angle, they can tune in to *Raw* to hear Jerry Lawler scream about Miss Jackie's puppies.

As Raw was poised to gain traction with superior talent and better storylines, he watered it down by tilting the draft lottery to favor Smackdown. The solution was to try new concepts on Smackdown until something clicked. If fans detected that Smackdown was the "underdog" brand, they might be more likely to get behind it. McMahon has flunked the first big test of the brand extension.

I TOLD YOU SO. Bill Goldberg's one-year contract with WWE expired on March 14, and he left the company after a lackluster run. Although Goldberg often tries to gain sympathy by complaining about his injuries and unlucky breaks, he always comes out on top somehow. WWE lost money on the deal, but at WrestleMania XX, Goldberg cleanly pinned Brock Lesnar, whom McMahon was grooming to become his biggest star. And this happened because Lesnar, too, had announced his intention to leave WWE.

As journalists, we often give McMahon a pass by suggesting that it's easy to second-guess his decisions, or that he can't possibly predict the future. But knowing how his creative formula works, and knowing Goldberg's personality, just about everyone covering the industry expected "Da Man" to fail in WWE. Why didn't McMahon, the so-called "Walt Disney Of Wrestling," recognize those pitfalls and work around them?

Well, Vince, I told you so—exactly one year ago in the August 2003 issue of *Inside Wrestling.* In my "On Assignment" column, I noted, "I wish

you had saved your money, Vince. Does anyone seriously believe that Goldberg, even if he signs a long-term contract, will be an integral part of WWE storylines for more than a few months? To me, it's a near-certainty that he will become disgruntled with the lifestyle of a full-time wrestler and claim the business is morally bankrupt, or he'll trip over a lighting cable and sit out for another 18 months while collecting a fat paycheck ... Goldberg simply doesn't have a passion for the business."

As it turned out, though, McMahon made less of an effort than Goldberg. Incredibly, Goldberg maintained a professional attitude most of the time and remained pretty much injury-free throughout that tumultuous year. In that sense, McMahon was the failure, not Goldberg. So I admit that my analysis was slightly wrong. Hey, you don't expect me to predict the future, do you?

To the surprise of very few (and especially not Liz Hunter), Bill Goldberg did not re-sign with WWE after his contract expired in March. Could his next stop be TNA? Perhaps some or all of the money set aside for Hulk Hogan could be offered to "Da Man."

A GLORIOUS REBOUND? WWE's loss could be NWA-TNA's gain if Bill Goldberg hooks up with the PPV-based company. I have no doubt that TNA has sent feelers out to Goldberg to see whether he'd be willing to replace Hulk Hogan as the potential savior of the company. Hogan is still nursing that bad knee and, even worse, he's no longer acknowledging that he will ever work for TNA. Sting is TNA's most prominent star right now, and Randy Savage might be persuaded to make an appearance on the company's first Sunday night, three-hour pay-per-view, Bound for Glory, if that ever happens.

I hate to bruise their egos, but Sting plus Savage does not equal Hogan. Bill Goldberg? Possibly. While Hogan is a bigger star in a historical sense, Goldberg's peak was more recent and he has garnered more mainstream publicity than Sting or Savage. I have the perfect main event for the PPV: A.J. Styles and Sting vs. Goldberg and Savage.

I would definitely pay to see that. □

Strange list of the month

FIVE WWE EMPLOYEES LEFT AT THE BOTTOM OF THE LOTTERY BIN

1. Howard Finkel
2. Marc Loyd
3. Nick Patrick
4. Chavo Guerrero Sr.
5. Stephanie McMahon

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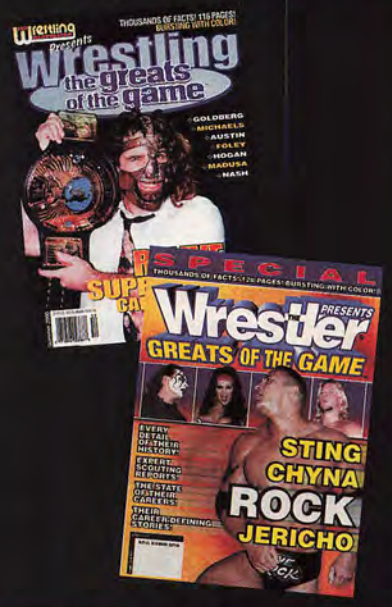

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win, lose, or draw

By Harry Burkett

"CPR CONTINUED FOR a final few minutes until doctors determined all resuscitation efforts were futile. Thirteen minutes after arriving at the hospital—33 minutes since the fall—all work on Owen was stopped. At 8:12 p.m. Central Standard Time, the supervising doctor called Code ... Wearing nothing but a pair of white socks, Owen's naked, lifeless body was covered with a white sheet. Meanwhile, the show went on ..."

Those are the most memorable and disturbing lines from Martha Hart's book, *Broken Harts: The Life And Death Of Owen Hart.* That vivid account made my heart stop, too, at least for a moment, while reading about Owen's inspiring life and infuriating death.

Approaching the fifth anniversary of Owen's death, I thought it was important to acknowledge that event in some way and figure out the lasting legacy of that horrific night in Kansas City. But what is that legacy? I can't say that wrestling forever changed on May 23, 1999. I'd be hard-pressed to find an example of how Owen's death changed the wrestling business in any significant way.

I don't know anyone who stopped watching WWE because of it. The evening after the tragically, but aptly titled Over the Edge pay-per-view, *Raw* scored a record-breaking 7.0, which is astronomical by today's standards. What about imposing more oversight or regulations upon pro wrestling? If anything, the trend toward taking wrestling out of the jurisdiction of state athletic commissions is continuing.

And what about the biggest issue brought forth in the weeks following Owen's death, that of unionization? Jesse Ventura and Roddy Piper were among the retired wrestlers who went to the national airwaves, including high-profile programs such as *Larry King Live,* and insisted wrestlers needed protection against mega-promotions such as WWE and WCW. No group of wrestlers has made any attempt to unionize, although the rationale should be stronger than ever since WWE is the only major league outfit turning a profit these days.

So was Owen's death in vain? Didn't it mean anything?

Although I've had five years to think about it, I was stumped by the answer. Owen's fatal fall was the single worst event to take place in the two decades I've been following the business, both as a fan and a writer. Obviously, Owen's death attracted deep sympathy from people inside and outside of wrestling. But was that all?

If there was a message in Owen's life and death, what exactly was it?

His wife, Martha, meant the world to Owen Hart, and vice versa, and she was understandably bitter about the way her husband died in May 1999. Five years later, Harry Burkett is still trying to sort out the fallout from his tragic fall at the Over the Edge pay-per-view.

That's the question I was mulling over during one quiet afternoon as I stared at the blinking cursor on my home computer. The faint sounds of birds chirping and the low hum of my CPU had a meditating effect on me. It was in that frame of mind that I began flipping through *Broken Harts,* which Martha co-wrote with *Calgary Sun* sports columnist Eric Francis.

I'm not an avid reader of all the wrestling biographies and autobiographies that have been released over the past few years. Because our office has copies of all of them, I consider them more like reference books, borrowing snippets from them when appropriate. I began reading *Broken Harts* at 2:00. Four hours later, the sun was setting and I was interrupting my screensaver so more light could radiate from the blank Microsoft Word page still on my computer.

If I was ever going to discover the true relevance of Owen's life and death, it makes sense that the answer would come from his widow. I had mixed feelings about Martha before I read her book. Ninety-five percent of me felt sorry for Martha, and I knew—through the loss of her husband—she had sacrificed far too much for professional wrestling. Like most people, I was angry with the decision-makers in WWE who put him in those rafters in the first place.

Debra and Jeff Jarrett are two of the few people in the wrestling business whom Martha discusses in a truly positive light in her book, *Broken Harts: The Life And Death Of Owen Hart.* She never liked the business at all.

Then there was the other five percent. Martha did several interviews after Owen's death, completely ripping the wrestling industry. Martha repeatedly said she never liked the business, had no interest in it whatsoever, and had preferred that Owen were in another line of work. She depicted wrestling as corrupt, wrestlers as morally bankrupt prima donnas, and wrestling fans as bloodthirsty maniacs.

I took offense to that. But was I going to complain about it here in *PWI?* No, because as far as I was concerned, Martha was entitled to say anything she wanted. She had paid the ultimate price. But if Martha was right, that meant I was wasting my life covering a sleazy business with sleazy people in it—and I might be one of the sleazy people she's talking about! I thought of how tough it must have been for Owen to work in a profession that Martha didn't respect. After all, Owen had gained countless friends and a top-notch reputation in the wrestling business. The fact that Martha had no appreciation for such a huge part of his life must have been troubling for Owen.

In *Broken Harts,* Martha confirms that she dislikes wrestling. But she mentions her positive impressions of Jeff Jarrett, Debra, Joanie "Chyna" Laurer, Chris Jericho, and Hulk Hogan, among others. Martha asserts, convincingly, how she tried to give Vince McMahon a fair shake immediately following Owen's death, although, deep in her gut, she believed he was partially responsible. She also acknowledges the compassion of wrestling fans at the Kemper Arena that fateful night and in Calgary during Owen's funeral.

Martha did, however, make a firm decision in the early going: Pro wrestling wasn't going to make one penny from her husband's death. It was bad enough that Owen had spent the prime years of his life away from his family. Wrestling wasn't going to exploit his death, too. She cites that as the final straw in her relationship with McMahon. While Martha thought some segments of *Raw's* tribute show to Owen were tastefully done, she abhorred the fact that the extra ratings points gained from his death had profited WWE. She invited McMahon to the funeral on the condition that footage of the service—even outside the building—wouldn't appear on his television shows. When footage of WWE superstars arriving at the funeral aired on *Raw* that very night, she was furious.

Her depiction of the Hart family was most telling. Wrestling was the Harts' world, and Vince McMahon was god of that world. Or, perhaps more to Martha's line of thinking, Vince was the devil, and too many relatives were selling their souls to him.

Owen was one of the few wrestlers who kept a safe distance from that world through humor and a solid family life. He enjoyed wrestling and respected his fans, but he refused to be consumed by the fantasy aura of fame. While Owen was standing in those rafters, reluctantly allowing his life to depend upon a release mechanism, all he wanted to do was get home to his wife and kids.

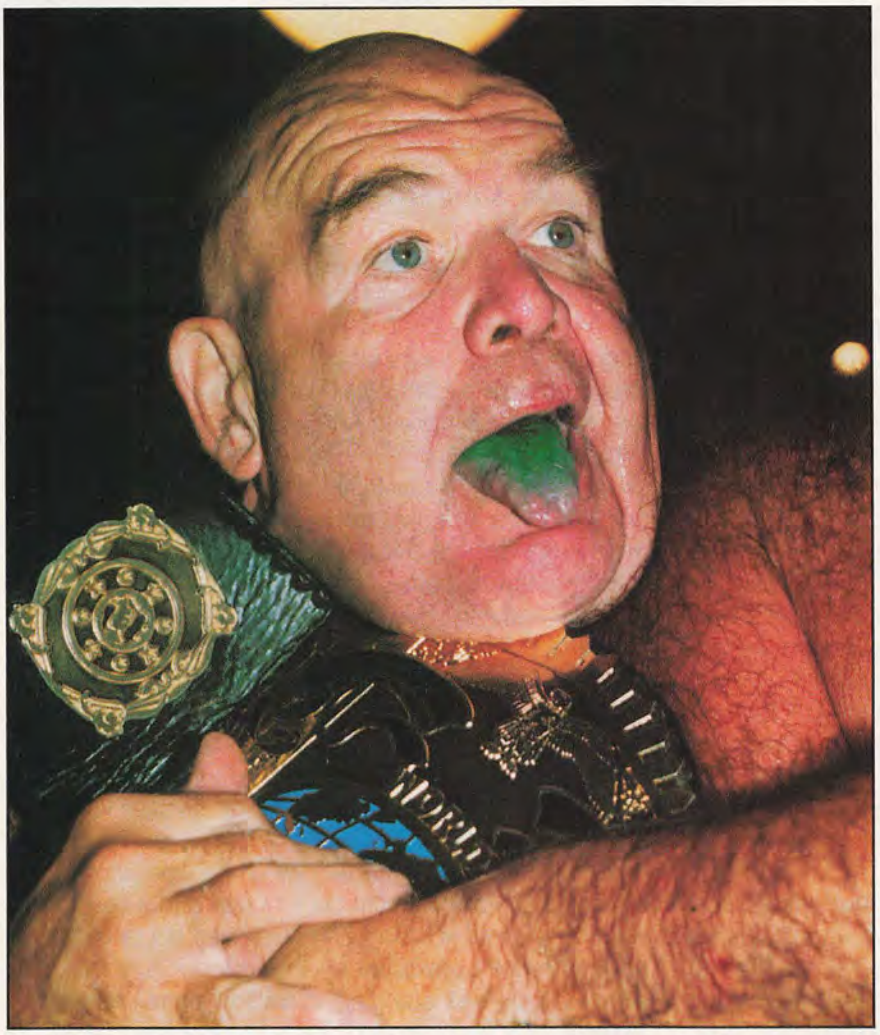
He knew what was really important, even at the very end. That's his legacy. □

the straight shooter

By Dan Murphy

THE EDITORIAL BOARD of PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED and its sister publications chooses to endorse the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame as pro wrestling's official Hall of Fame, but there's another Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame located in Schenectady, New York.

I understand—and agree with—the editorial board's decision to recognize *Observer* Publisher Dave Meltzer's Hall, but I also fully support the efforts made by the two-year-old PWHF and its architects, Tony Vellano and Dr. Bob Bryla. The PWHF may not be as old or established as the *Observer* HOF, but its organizers are doing more than simply honoring the sport's greats with induction. They are also developing a physical pro wrestling museum and hosting meet-and-greet events in which fans get a chance to sit down and talk with some of the legends of wrestling.



For those who always thought what George "The Animal" Steele did in the ring was the product of a brilliant wrestling mind, well, that wasn't always the case. Dan Murphy learned a lot of "secrets" about Steele from listening to the man himself at a Pro Wrestling Hall of Fame fundraiser in upstate New York.

This year, the PWHF will induct the following people: William Muldoon, Angelo Savoldi, Lord Littlebrook, Mae Young, Gordon Solie, Vince McMahon Sr., Mad Dog and Butcher Vachon, Freddie Blassie, Verne Gagne, Terry Funk, and Harley Race. For what it's worth, all but Savoldi, Littlebrook, Young, and Butcher Vachon are also in the *Observer* Hall, showing that both are more or less on the same page. The PWHF inducts a woman wrestler and a midget each year, while the *Observer* has a more international flavor.

I recently had the opportunity to attend a fundraising dinner for the PWHF in upstate New York, during which I rubbed elbows with the likes of George "The Animal" Steele, Dewey "The Missing Link" Robertson, Angelo "King Kong" Mosca, Billy "Red" Lyons, Dick "The Destroyer" Beyer, and a host of wrestling journalists and fans from throughout New York and Ontario.

If you're a wrestling fan, there is absolutely nothing better than sitting down with an old-timer and listening to his war stories. I went to the event to support Vellano and Bryla, visit The Destroyer, and enjoy a great meal, but once the legends got to talking, I had to bust out the notebook and take notes. Here are just a few of the great stories they shared.

George Steele, on his trademark green tongue:

"Everyone always asks me about the tongue. I wish I could say that was a great idea I came up with to help my character. It wasn't. It happened by accident. The fact of the matter is that one day I had a few drinks and I didn't want the promoter to know, so I put a few Chlorets in my mouth. I had no idea my tongue was green, but when I stuck it out during

the match, the fans went nuts. That was the start of it all. I had to suck on Chlorets every night for the rest of my career. On the upside, many wrestlers told me I had the freshest breath they ever smelled."

Steele, on his turnbuckle diet:

"The turnbuckle was another thing that just happened. One day, a woman in the audience got so fed up with me that she threw a little throw pillow at me. There I was with this pillow, and I had no idea what to do. I didn't want to throw it back it at her, or the next week everyone and their brother would show up and throw pillows—or other things—at me. So I just picked it up and gnawed on it and ripped it open. All this foam spilled out and I threw it around. I was a pretty hairy guy, and some of it stuck on me, and it looked good on TV. I rubbed some of the foam in my opponent's face, and the fans booed me out of the building. The next week, somebody suggested I try the same thing with the turnbuckle pad. It seems like a great idea until you realize you're chewing on something a bunch of sweaty guys have been rubbing up against all night."

Side note: George's opponent did not care much for the pillow spot. He ingested so much foam he had to be hospitalized.

Dick Beyer, on his intergender tag experiences:

"I was teamed with a lady against Billy (Red Lyons, Beyer's brother-in-law). His partner was this beautiful blonde with a real shapely body. Mine was this short, fat, beast of a woman. At one point, Billy picks his girl up on his shoulders and motions for me to do the same, like a chicken fight. So I pantomime, 'You want me to pick up that?' and he nods. So I get down, get my head between her two huge legs, and strain like I can't get her up. So Billy points to the corner and tells me to put her on top and back into her. So I get her up, and I get in position, and I finally hoist that fat lady up in the air. Then I staggered a little to the left, I staggered to the right, and I fell flat on my face. I'm telling you, I was dying laughing, Billy and his partner were dying laughing—every single fan in that building was dying laughing. The only person who wasn't laughing was my partner. She wanted to kill me."

With a name like The Destroyer, Dick Beyer (shown against Victor Rivera 31 years ago) didn't do much to try to get laughs in the ring, although he did bust out one classic story at the PWHF fundraiser that had everyone in attendance rolling.

Another side note: Dick turned the match from comedy to near-tragedy when he bodyslammed Lyons' partner. The crowd was so furious about the man-on-woman violence that it nearly rioted.

I wish I could have taken down everything Mosca said, but he had me laughing too hard to take notes. For a good 15 minutes, everyone in attendance was treated to his comedy stylings as he roasted his fellow legends with one-liners such as, "It's great to see all these old faces with their new teeth." Good stuff.

You know, it's funny. For a bunch of guys who hit their primes in the days of black and white film, the legends are much more colorful than many of their wealthier successors.

Congratulations to the PWHF on a memorable event. And regardless of which Hall of Fame you prefer, you owe it to yourself to get better acquainted with the men and women who contributed to the rich history of our great sport. □

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Nov. 1988: Dusty Rhodes vs. Barry Windham: The Night The Teacher Learned A Lesson. Also: Kerry-Lawler, Lex Luger, Muraco-Valentine, Freebirds.

Dec. 1988: Exclusive "Hotseat" Interview: Roddy Piper—Will He Ever Be Back? Also: Powers of Pain, Ultimate Warrior, Ric Flair, Bambi-Mystic, Kevin Von Erich.

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Aug. 1989: Your Ballots Are In: Hulkamania Rules! Also: Tanaka & Diamond, Rick Steamboat, Bigelow-Rhodes, Rick Rude, Jim Cornette.

Sept. 1989: Savage Is Shamed By Hogan—Only Elizabeth Can Save Him Now. Also: Lex Luger, Mil Mascaras, Dusty Rhodes, Bushwhackers, Skandor Akbar.

Oct. 1989: Dusty Rhodes' WWF Hit List. Also: Hall-Pillman-Vicious, Curt Hennig, Warriors, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

Nov. 1989: Please, Elizabeth—Don't Wrestle Sherri! Also: Mil Mascaras, Dangerously-Cornette, Sting-T. Funk, Lex Luger, Jake Roberts.

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Feb. 1990: Sex Symbol Showdown: Rude's Out ... Piper's In ... And The Fans Love It! Also: Warriors-Skyscrapers, Jimmy Snuka, Tom Zenk, Destruction Crew, Kerry Von Erich

March 1990 (Special Issue): The '80s: A Rousing Review Of A Dynamic Decade. Also: Bobby Heenan, Ric Flair, Paul Orndorff.

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May 1990: WrestleMania VI Main Event: Hulk Hogan vs. Ultimate Warrior: Exclusive Preview & Analysis. Also: Jerry Lawler, Al Perez, Lex Luger, Woman, LPWA.

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July 1990: Our Urgent Plea To Hulk Hogan & The Ultimate Warrior: Team Up And Eliminate These Men. Also: Steiners, Sting, Earthquake, Kokina Maximus, Tessa.

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Oct. 1990: Sting: "I Feel Like I've Conquered The World!" Also: Legion of Doom, Bushwhackers, El Gigante, Mike Rotundo, Juice Patrol.

Nov. 1990: Ric Flair & Hulk Hogan: A Tale Of Two Ex-Champions. Also: Sid Vicious, Sgt. Slaughter, Jeannie-Toni, Mr. Fuji & Orient Express.

Dec. 1990: Halloween Havoc Horror! Why Sting Is Spooked By Sid Vicious. Also: Hulk Hogan, Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Larry Zbyszko.

Jan. 1991: Warning To The Ultimate Warrior: The Legion Of Doom Will Lead You To Destruction. Also: Paul E. Dangerously, Chris Adams, Steiners, Lawler-T. Funk.

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March 1991: The Earthquake Feud Rumbles On: Will Hulk Hogan Be The Victim Of His Own Deadly Obsession? Also: Roberts-Martel, Sting-Hansen, Keirn-Perez, Barry Windham.

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Dec. 1992: Hey, Ric Flair: Stop Whining And Start Winning. Also: Razor Ramon, Heavenly Bodies, Jeff Jarrett, Windham & D. Rhodes, NWA title.

March 1993: Who Controls The Balance Of Power In The WWF? Also: Shawn Michaels, Nikita Koloff, Windham-Dustin, Survivor Series, Rod Price.

April 1993: New Blood! The Wrestlers Who Could Revitalize The WWF In '93. Also: Z-Man & Gunn, Sting-Vader, Dangerous Alliance, Ric Flair.

May 1993: Exclusive WrestleMania IX Match Analysis. Also: Andre the Giant, Pillman & Austin, Great Muta, Headshrinkers-Steiners, 2 Cold Scorpio.

Jan. 1994 (Special Edition): Wrestling's Seasonal Spectaculars—WWF SummerSlam, WCW Fall Brawl. Also: Rick Martel, Razor Ramon, Steven Regal, Paul Orndorff, Mascaras-Liger, ECW baseball bat matches.

Feb. 1994: Our Holiday Wish List For 1994. Also: Hogan-Savage-Bret, Hacksaw Duggan, Doinks, Hollywood Blonds, Steven Regal.

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Jan. 1998: Our Holiday Wish List For The Stars (Sable). Also: Bret Hart, Rey Misterio Jr., Steve Austin, Roddy Piper, Fritz Von Erich.
Feb. 1998: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For '98. Also: Brian Pillman, Sting, Hunter Hearst Helmsley, Reckless Youth.
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Oct. 1999 (Special Issue): WCW Midyear Report. Also: Mankind & Shamrock, Snow-Holly, Sting, Edge, Flair-Robinson, AIWF.
Nov. 1999: Crash At The Bash! Enter Sid, Viciously! Also: Undertaker-Austin, Acolytes, Master P, Debra, Justin Credible.
Dec. 1999: The Rock: What Makes You Love/Hate This Man? Also: Sting, Shane Douglas, Droz, Piper-Bagwell, Taz.
Holiday 1999 (Special Issue): The 1999 Turnbuckle Turkey Awards. Also: Sting, Dogg-Gunn, Undertaker, Steve Corino, 2000 calendar.
Jan. 2000: Dreaming Of An Extreme Christmas (Tommy Dreamer & Francine). Also: Goldberg, Al Snow, Billy Gunn, Doring & Road Kill, cigar-chompers.
Feb. 2000: Wrestling's Top Stars: What's Ahead For 2000! Also: Vince-Bulldog, Mike Awesome, Sid Vicious, Gorilla Monsoon.
March 2000: Kevin Nash & Scott Hall: Getting Inside The Outsiders' Heads. Also: Dudleys, Jerry Lynn, Vince-DX, Kimberly, Zero Gravity.
April 2000 (Special Issue): The Y2K Computer Tournament. Also: Jarrett-PTB, Christopher & Taylor, Lou E. Dangerously, Lawler-Fantastico.
May 2000: Hey, Scott, Watch Your Back! The NWO Is Setting You Up! Also: Hacksaw Duggan, Rikishi Phatu, Test, Mike Awesome.
June 2000: Chris Jericho's Deadliest Enemy: His Ego! Also: Tazz, Kidman-Torrie, Nash-Funk, Buff Bagwell, New Jack.
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Oct. 2001: Will Debra Ice Stone-Cold? Also: Vince vs. Shane, Chyna, William Regal, former Big Three stars.
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April 2002: Feud Alert! The Lowdown On 2002's Hotest Showdowns! Also: Rikishi, Stacy Keibler, Shane Helms, 2001 report cards.
June 2002: Special Comeback Issue: Triple-H, Chris Benoit, Kevin Nash. Also: Chris Jericho, Howard Stern, hypothetical unification showdowns.
Aug. 2002: WrestleMania X8: The *Real* Winners And Losers. Also: Hulk Hogan, Scott Steiner, Jamie Noble, Jarrett-Christopher, All-Japan.
Oct. 2002: Dark Side Be Damned! Undertaker's At His Best As Himself! Also: Ric Flair, Triple-H, Wahoo McDaniel, Goldberg, WWE-Hollywood.
Dec. 2002: The Impossible Dream, Part 2: Can Angle Win Another Olympic Gold? Also: Shane McMahon, PTC-WWE, Trish Stratus, Malice, next best things.
Feb. 2003: HBK's Miracle Comeback: Will The Fans Let Him Make The Smart Choice? Also: Edge, RVD, Chuck & Billy, Russ Haas Memorial, Turnbuckle Turkeys.
April 2003: Big Poppa Pump: On A Dirty Mission To Clean Up WWE. Also: Ron Killings, Big Show, WWE agents, report cards.
June 2003: Grabbing For Greatness: Triple-H's Desperate Quest For Immortality. Also: Abdullah, Shawn Michaels, Chris Benoit, WCW winners & losers.
Aug. 2003: WrestleMania XIX: The Supercard That Changed The Course Of History! Also: Rene Dupree, The Hurricane, Chris Jericho, Team Angle, injuries.
Oct. 2003: Done? Don't Count On It! Stone-Cold Will Die If He Can't Fight! Also: Kliq, Miss Elizabeth, D-Lo Brown, FBI, WWE nostalgia.
Dec. 2003: The 10 Most Respectable Wrestlers Who Get No Respect. Also: Dragon vs. Misterio, Hulk Hogan, Lance Storm, Sting, Lawler vs. Rhodes.
Feb. 2004: The Game vs. Da Man: The Death War That's Too Brutal To Last! Also: Undertaker, Kane-Shane, Shaniqua, Briscoes vs. Briscos, Turnbuckle Turkeys.
April 2004: The Raw vs. Smackdown Super Bowl Party: WWE Will Never Be The Same! Also: Tajiri, Maven, Carly Colon, Raw report cards.
June 2004: Who Can Tame The Beast That Is Batista? Also: Hardcore Holly, Michael Shane, Chavo-Eddie, "McSpansion's" 20th anniversary.
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Size: 6'1", 210
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2002—26
2001— 31
2000—144
1999—234
Titles: WWE World tag team
WWE European
WWE cruiserweight
WWE hardcore
WCW cruiserweight
WCW hardcore
Southern Championship Wrestling heavyweight
Southern Championship Wrestling tag team
World Wrestling Organization lightweight
***PWI* Awards:** Most Improved Wrestler:
2nd runner-up (2001)

[[the numbers]]

Offense (8.5): The Hurricane's offense was often compared to that of Chris Kanyon in the past, but his comic book persona has squelched that innovative style during the past couple of years. His offense has become much more basic. He now focuses more on comedic timing than in-ring timing. Attempting a mock choke-slam on a 400-pounder is more important to him than a well-placed spinning heel kick.

Defense (8.0): His defensive tactics have suffered greatly since he has been placed in a comedic role in WWE. While Shane Helms was in WCW, his matches against other talented cruiserweights—including Chavo Guerrero Jr., Rey Misterio Jr., and Billy Kidman—were textbook displays of counterwrestling.

Experience (9.5): It's amazing to consider The Hurricane has been around nearly as long as The Undertaker and Steve Austin. The difference is that he spent the first eight years of his career away from the spotlight, honing his craft in North Carolina, an indy hotbed in the 1990s, and he was only 15 at the time of his pro debut.

Conditioning (8.5): The Hurricane isn't a gym rat, as the insiders would say, but his dedication to cardiovascular and aerobic exercise is apparent every time he gets into the ring. Nonetheless, The Hurricane isn't really being tested in six- or seven-minute matches on *Raw* and house shows, and he is rarely asked to extend himself beyond that point anymore. Hanging around Rosey too much won't help him in this area.

Science (8.5): Hurricane doesn't excel in the science of on-the-mat grappling, but he mastered the physics of wrestling long before it became cool to do so. He was doing suicide planchas in the Carolinas by the mid-1990s. Hurricane and his peers from that time and place, including The Hardy Boyz and Shannon Moore, were on the cutting edge.

Stamina (9.0): He hasn't been able to demonstrate his proven stamina on Raw cards. One has to believe that Helms challenged himself a bit more on the indy circuit and in WCW, where he defeated Chavo Guerrero Jr. for the cruiserweight title in a breathtaking 14-minute match in 2001. Whether he still has the desire to go the distance is an open question. He sure doesn't get many opportunities.

Power (7.5): As long as The Hurricane teams with Rosey, at least one—if not both—of his opponents is likely to be a heavyweight. Do Hurricane and Rosey have a prayer against Raw tag champs Ric Flair and Batista? Probably not. His lack of power wouldn't be as much of a factor in Smackdown's cruiserweight division, however.

Speed (9.5): As one of the few cruiserweights on the Raw roster, The Hurricane can frustrate larger opponents with his speed. Against lumbering big men like Mark Henry, he can string together enough high-flying moves and well-timed impact maneuvers to score quick victories. Against more agile big men like Randy Orton, it's not that easy.

Ability To Absorb Punishment (8.0): The Hurricane is rarely able to recover from high-impact moves from bigger foes, whether it is Kane's choke-slam or Batista's demon bomb. Nor is he easily able to counter many submission holds applied by opponents with greater size and reach—not even with his famous "Hurri-powers."

Quality Of Opposition (9.0): Before the WWE lottery on March 22, Raw had become widely recognized as having the toughest competition in the world—and The Hurricane had been struggling, even against fellow mid-carders. He was probably quietly hoping to be selected for Smackdown. Will the shakeup in talent provide any opportunities for The Hurricane to move up? That remains to be seen.

① **It's been a struggle for The Hurricane on Raw cards of late. That big win live on *Raw* over The Rock last spring wasn't the springboard he hoped it would be. He gets the occasional big TV match against key players such as Randy Orton. Too bad recent results haven't been good.**

[[the analysis]]

Repertoire: Helms was given more freedom to shine in WCW. Since arriving in WWE, he has been told not to execute his sensational finisher, the vertebreaker, and asked not to use the superkick (formerly known as the Nightmare on Helms Street superkick) as often because of the inevitable comparisons to Shawn Michaels. Even the chokeslam is a no-no. WWE's recent endorsement of a mat-based style won't work to Hurricane's advantage, either.

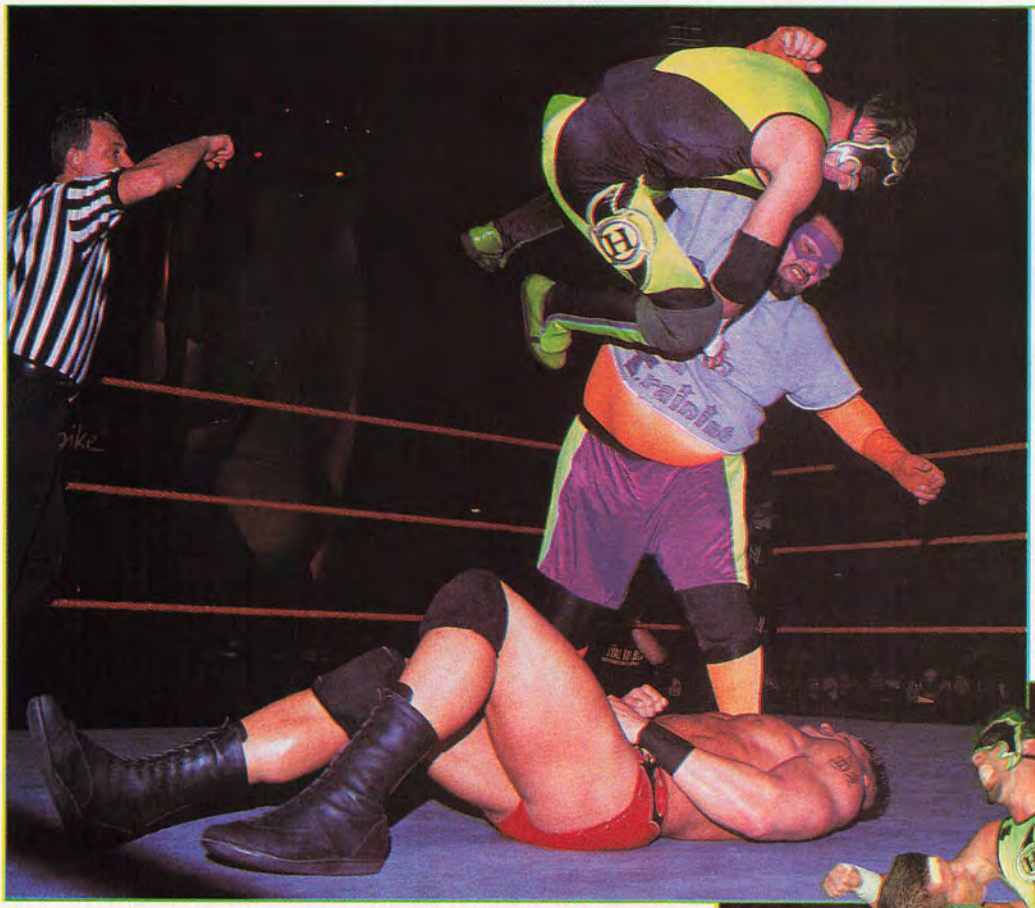
Strengths: This young man realizes how long it took him to get to WWE. Helms toiled in the independents down south until he finally got his big break in WCW. Now that Helms is in WWE, he isn't going to waste this opportunity with complaints or a prima donna attitude. He's a comic book aficionado, so if Creative wants him to dye his hair green, don a cape, and pretend he can fly, then he's the man.

Weaknesses: He can't sing. As strange as it may sound, that ties into Helms' willingness to do anything to keep his job. WCW Creative Director Vince Russo had the brainstorm of putting Helms, Shannon Moore, and Evan Karagias in a boy band named Three Count. They were dreadful. As usual, Russo turned a clever one-night joke into a permanent gimmick. Hurricane or not, Helms performs best without one-dimensional gimmicks.

Defining Career Moment: How would "Sugar" Shane Helms top his performance at WCW's final pay-per-view, Greed, at which he pinned Chavo Guerrero Jr. for the cruiserweight title? Helms did it the following night on *Monday Nitro* when he gave Billy Kidman a shot at his newly won belt. He used the vertebreaker to defeat Kidman within four minutes. WCW had some pretty big plans for Helms. Too bad it went out of business.

Future: Whether Helms has a bright future in WWE depends on one factor: Will Creative ever ditch the Hurricane concept? The character has provided some funny moments, and he even scored a fluke pinfall over The Rock as The Hurricane last year, but his career hasn't progressed all that much beyond that point. And, no, we don't want to see Gregory Helms emerge with a full-time reporter gimmick, either.

② **There was a time when Hurricane was nearly as hot as Randy Orton is now. In the last year, though, he's been closer to the level of Mark Jindrak, and his fortunes show no sign of improving significantly. Has the Hurricane character run its course?**



③ Hurricane and Rosey can work fairly well together. However, we're still waiting for them to score their first major win as a team. And aside from a few superhero jokes when they first became a duo, they really aren't very funny.

④ One area in which Hurricane is lacking is power. His punches and clotheslines aren't going to knock out anybody. And with some of his best moves having been taken away from him, he is struggling to stand out using that new WWE style.

STAN HANSEN vs. BRUNO SAMMARTINO

DATA SHEET

Title At Stake	WWWF World heavyweight
Date	June 25, 1976
Site	Shea Stadium, Flushing, New York

SYNOPSIS

Neck and spinal injuries are the most horrifying and unpredictable injuries a wrestler can suffer. A fractured neck can end a wrestler's career—or even his life. At the very least, it puts the victim on the sidelines for anywhere from six months to two years, and even then, full recoveries are rare. The long-term damage can affect the wrestler for the rest of his life.

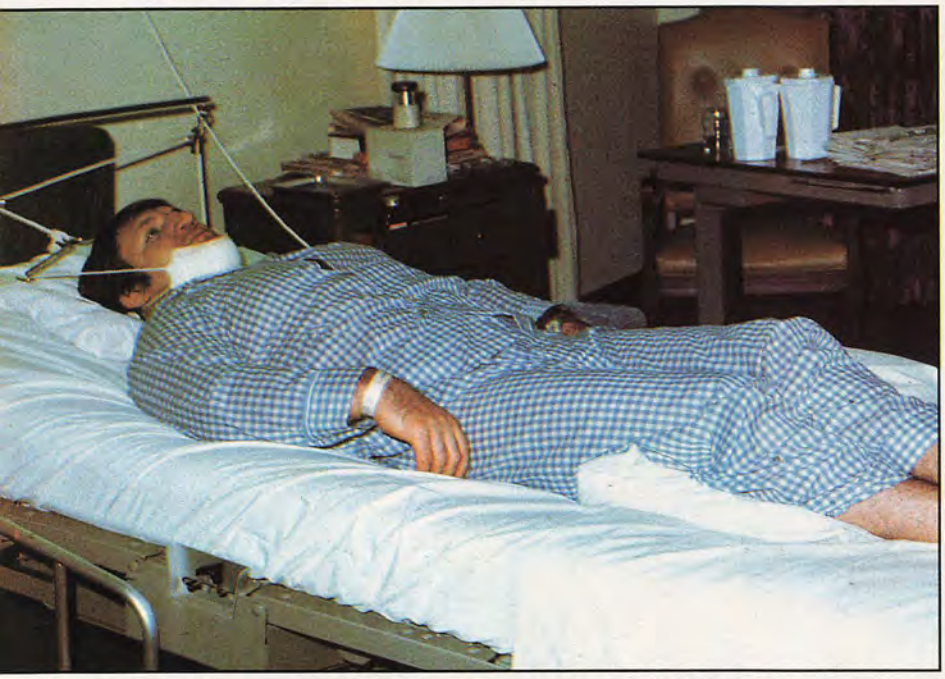
On April 26, 1976, WWWF World champion Bruno Sammartino learned a terrifying lesson about spinal injuries. Sammartino was defending his title against the rugged Stan Hansen in Madison Square Garden when Hansen opened a bloody gash above the champion's eye. With Sammartino partially blinded by his own blood, Hansen nailed him with a vicious lariat clothesline. But Bruno wouldn't stay down—and the referee stopped the match due to excessive blood loss and risk of infection.

Sammartino was seeing double and in severe pain in the locker room afterward and was sent to St. Clair Hospital. The doctors determined the lariat had fractured his sixth vertebra. Sammartino had come within millimeters of suffering permanent damage to his spinal cord.

Sammartino and his manager, Arnold Skoaland, were convinced that Hansen had slipped a foreign object into his elbow pad prior to hitting the lariat.

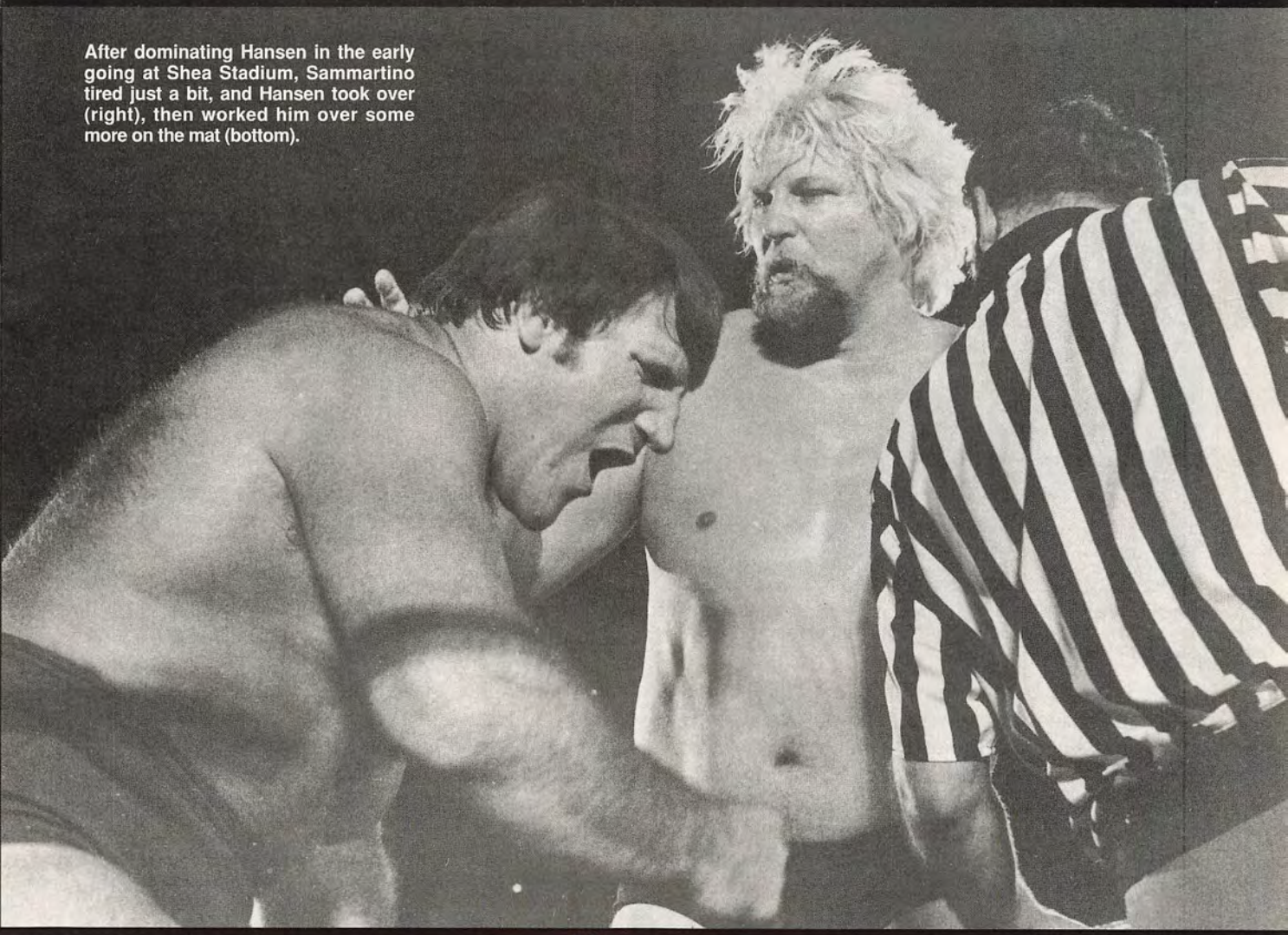
"Before the match I had asked the referee to examine the elbow pad. Then I examined it," Bruno remembered back then. "There's no question there was nothing there—then. As far as my injury later, I've no idea how he got the foreign object in the elbow pad ... I was able to continue after [an earlier blow to the neck], but I was groggy, setting me up for the lariat—which can't finish me unless that elbow pad is loaded!"

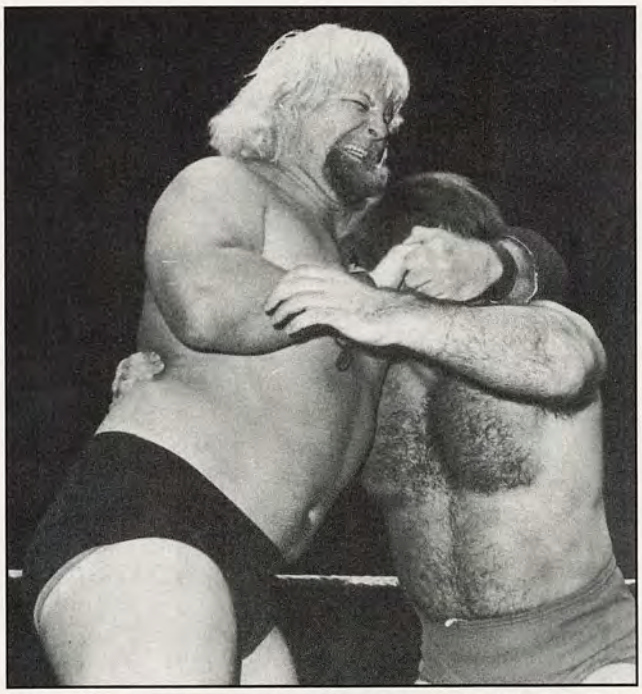
As Bruno recuperated in his hospi-



This is what Sammartino looked like after checking into a hospital following his match with Stan Hansen in Madison Square Garden in April 1976. He'd be ready for the rematch in just two months, though.

After dominating Hansen in the early going at Shea Stadium, Sammartino tired just a bit, and Hansen took over (right), then worked him over some more on the mat (bottom).





Hansen seemed a little desperate at times, as if he knew he had to put away "Da Brune" while he had the opportunity. He sure didn't do it.

tal bed, he demanded that Skoaland sign him for a rematch against Hansen as soon as possible. That match was signed for June 25, barely two months after Sammartino suffered the career-threatening injury. Sammartino realized another lariat could end his career, and that he was risking paralysis, but he couldn't stomach the thought of Hansen being the man to end his career.

Doctors and friends begged Sammartino not to go through with the match, but the bruiser from Abruzzi, Italy, would not be swayed. The rematch was to be on the undercard of the equally highly anticipated Antonio Inoki vs. Muhammad Ali bout taking place in Japan and being aired via closed-circuit TV to the fans at Shea Stadium.

A crowd of 35,000 fans attended the card at Shea Stadium, and an additional 15,000 watched on closed-circuit TV, eager to see Bruno get his revenge. An emotional Sammartino entered the ring to a hero's welcome and briefly acknowledged the cheers from the crowd as he removed the title belt from his waist. It was clear that either Sammartino would win, or that he'd leave the ring on a stretcher. No other outcome seemed possible.

The referee went to inspect Hansen's controversial elbow pad, but Sammartino could wait no longer. He screamed at the official to forget the inspection and get the match started.

When the bell sounded, Sammartino rushed Hansen, rocking the Texan with kicks and big left hands. Hansen collapsed to the mat under the barrage of blows and finally bailed out of the ring in desperation. Hansen thought Sammartino would be more conservative. He wasn't prepared for the tornado the champ had become. He turned to manager The Grand Wizard (standing in for Freddie Blassie) for advice, but Wizard was speechless. He had never seen this side of Bruno before.

Hansen warily climbed back into the ring, only to crumble under Bruno's attack again. Sammartino dominated Hansen with bombshell left hands, stomps, and armdrags. Hansen continued to run for cover, hoping to gain some sort of advantage outside the ring. But Bruno paced like a caged beast, stopping the referee's count and forcing Hansen to return to the lion's den. Every time he did, Sammartino lunged back toward him, battering Hansen to the canvas.

But Bruno's adrenaline could only hold out for so long. After eight weeks out of the ring, his conditioning had slipped a bit; he began to tire.

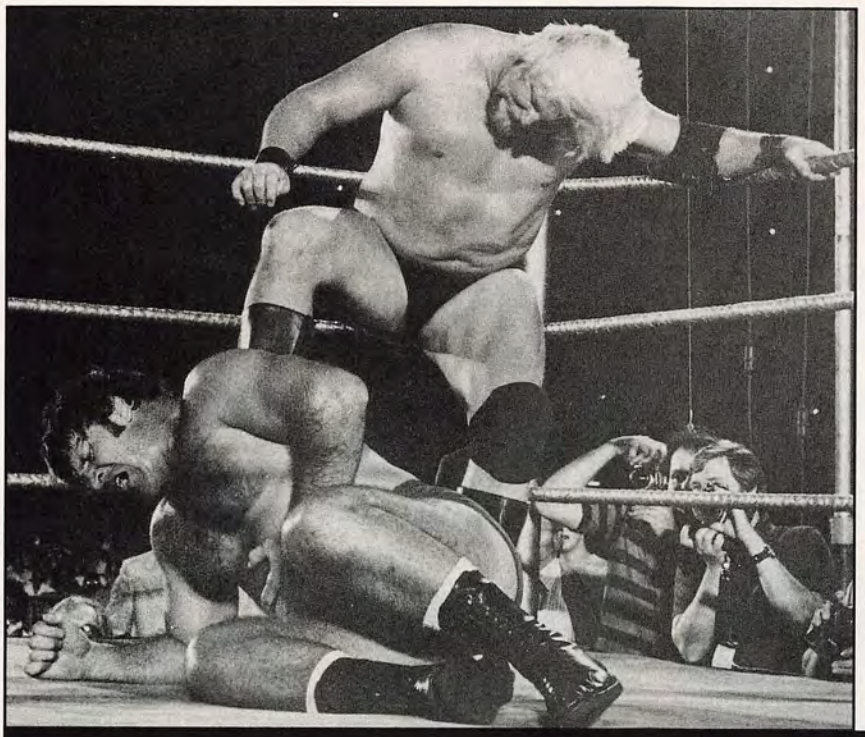
Every Sammartino punch, it seemed, found its mark.

Hansen—no slouch in the tough man department himself—somehow managed to weather Sammartino's powerful onslaught and brawled back to take the upper hand. Hansen knew he had to end the match when he could, so he stunned Sammartino with a series of punches, positioning the champion for the infamous lariat.

As the rowdy crowd called out in horror, Hansen hurled Sammartino off the ropes and aimed his lariat at Bruno's throat. Hansen charged a seemingly helpless Sammartino. At the lost possible instant, Bruno ducked Hansen's outstretched arm. Sammartino spun Hansen around and sent him sprawling to the mat. Hansen's murderous intent had reawakened the beast in Bruno, and he pounded away at his challenger. Bruno tore the elbow pad off Hansen and threw it from the ring. He then pounded Hansen's head into the cornerpost until Hansen's face ran red with plasma.

For the first time in his career, Hansen's eyes were wide with fear. He managed to break free of Sammartino, dove through the ropes, and high-tailed it back to the dressing room. "Da Brune" won the match by countout, and Hansen looked like a coward.

Bruno's miracle comeback would be one of the last great highlights of his career. He would lose the World title for good the following year to Billy Graham and go into semi-retirement. Hansen would win the AWA World title in 1985 before enjoying a long run in All-Japan Pro Wrestling. Their Shea Stadium showdown would be voted Match of the Year for 1976. □



Try and try as he did, Hansen couldn't break the WWWF World champion's body or his spirit (left), and when Sammartino knocked him out of the ring one too many times for his liking (below left), the master of the lariat took a powder and the WWWF belt was returned to the champ (below right).

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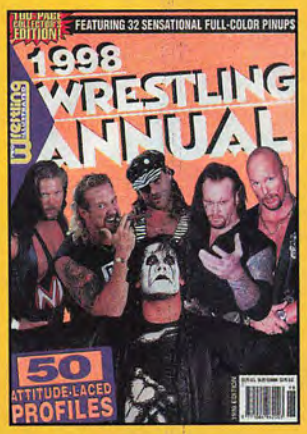

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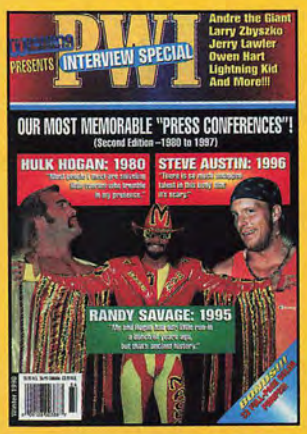

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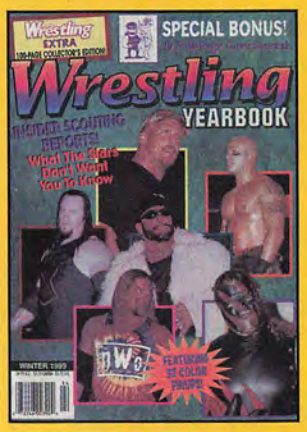

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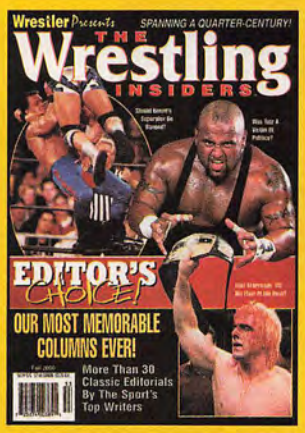

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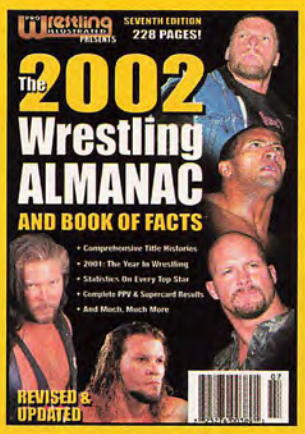

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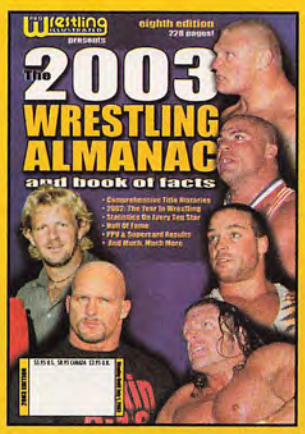

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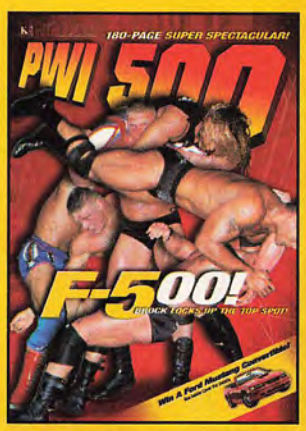

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You're at the airport. You see your favorite wrestler relaxing in one of the terminals. You rush up to him or her as questions fill your excited mind. There are certain things you just *have* to know about this person. Well, these are the 12 questions you'd never think of asking

12 questions

TRACY BROOKS

What is it like being the cute girl in wrestling?
I don't know. I'll find you one and ask her.

What's the worst misconception about you?
That my breasts are fake. *Hmmmmmm?*

What food can you just not live without?
Steak, rare. Just knock the horns off it and slap it in the ass!

If you had to walk away from wrestling tomorrow, what would you do?
Take over my dad's pig farm. Pig crap, fresh air, and all the pork you can eat!

What's your favorite article of clothing in your closet?
My pushup bras … best thing ever invented.

What's the creepiest thing a fan ever did for you?
A Band-Aid fell off of me during a match and a fan kept it. He wanted me to sign it, too.

You have a choice between Courtney Love, Michael Jackson, and Jim Hellwig to live with on a deserted island for the rest of your life. Which would you choose and why?
Michael Jackson. It would be like having a real live Mr. Potato Head, I could rearrange his face and I wouldn't have to worry about him hitting on me.

Which would you rather do: wrestle or valet—and why?
I'd rather wrestle, but I'm very happy with my role as "The Franchise's" valet in NWA-TNA.

Would you go on a date with *PWI* Senior Writer Dan Murphy? Why not?
Would it get me anywhere in this business? *[Laughs]* Just kidding! How about a write-up in *PWI? [Laughs]*

What's the worst thing about American drivers?
They are American. No offense, I love Americans, but you guys are the worst drivers!

What's your sign, babe?
Worst pickup line *ever*! By the way, guys, that line *never* works!

You have a hammer, a midget, and a roulette wheel. What are your plans for the evening?
Who cares about the hammer and the roulette wheel! I'd just want to see the midget do cartwheels all night! □

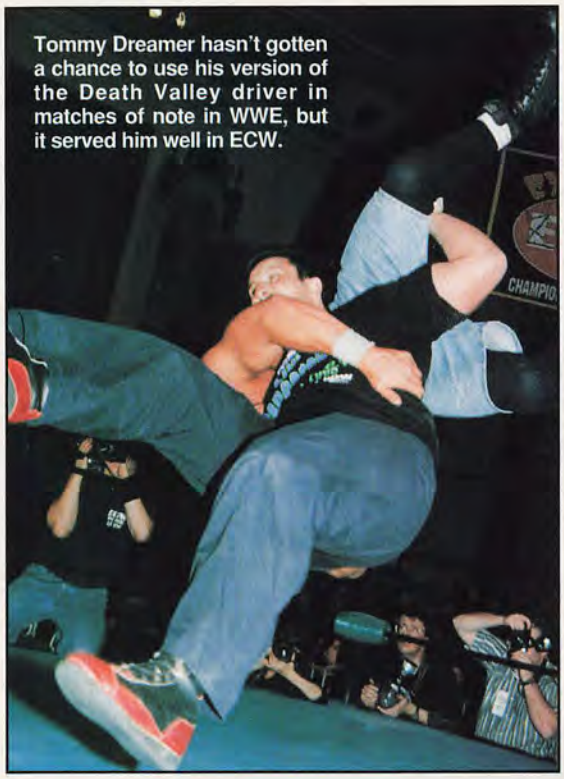
Photo By Vern Verna

fantastic finishers

Death Valley driver

You might also hear it being called: Spicolli driver, Death Valley bomb, DVD

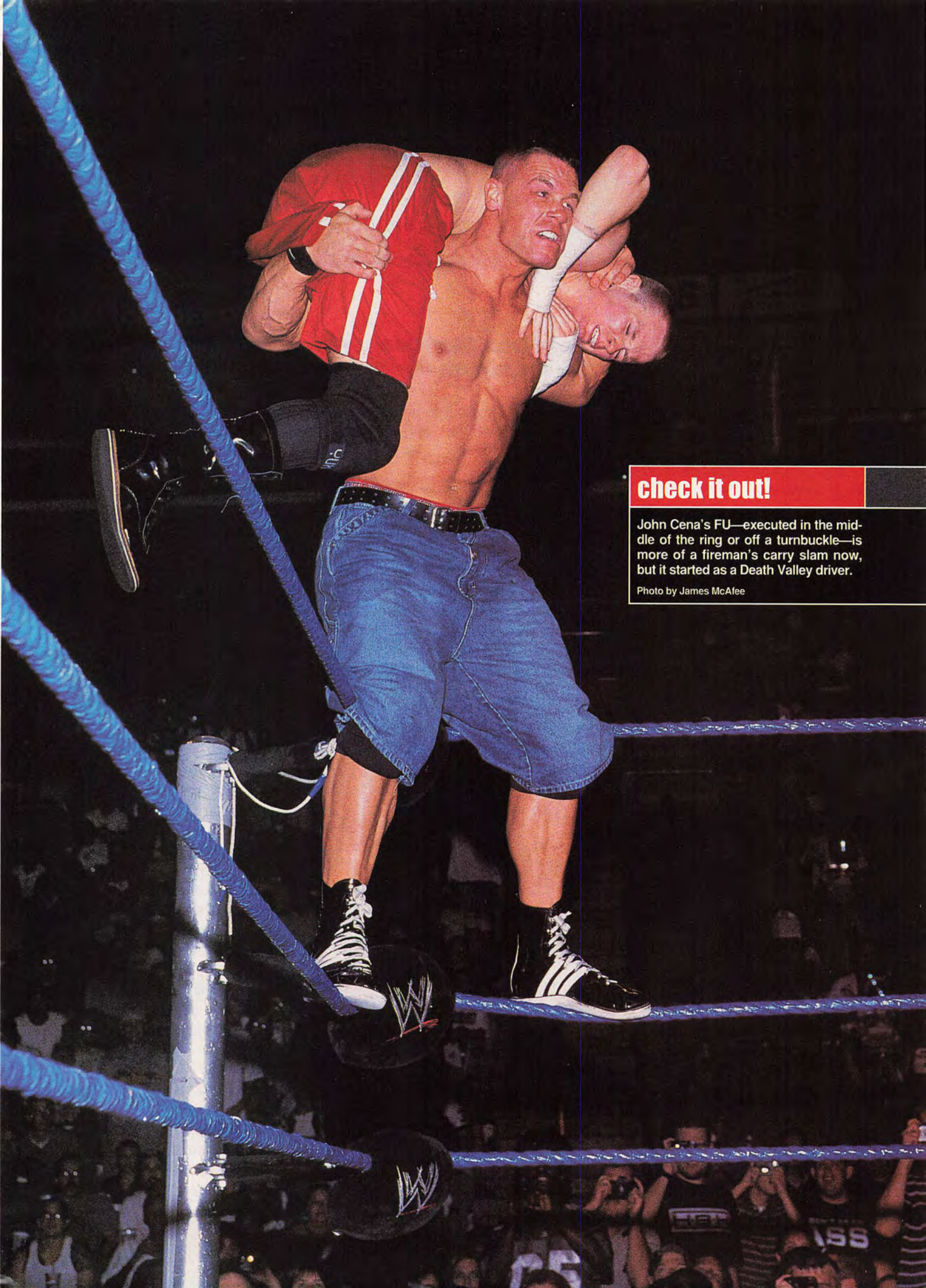
Where you might have seen it: This high-impact variation of the Samoan drop was popularized by Louie Spicolli and was his finisher for many years, most notably during his ECW tenure. However, the move was invented by pint-sized female wrestler Etsuko Mita in Japan. It helped catapult her to stardom in the late-1980s and into the 1990s. In the last few years of WCW, both Perry Saturn and Rick Steiner used the Death Valley driver as a finishing move. The third incarnation of Black Tiger, who wrestles in both Mexico and Japan, likes to use it to set up his triple-moonsault finishing combination. Tommy Dreamer also adopted the move as his own after the death of Spicolli in 1998.


Tommy Dreamer hasn't gotten a chance to use his version of the Death Valley driver in matches of note in WWE, but it served him well in ECW.

The scoop: The Death Valley driver evolved from the much simpler Samoan drop toward the end of the 1980s. The Samoan drop uses the combined weight of both wrestlers to crush the man taking the move as he lands back-first on the canvas. In similar fashion, the Death Valley driver uses the weight of both men to send an opponent to the mat, except the point of impact is the head. There are many variations of the Death Valley driver. The one called the Death Valley *bomb* is a tightly cradled version that is held into a pinning predicament upon impact. The cradled variation was first used by Zero-One's Tatsuhito Takaiwa during his days with New Japan Pro Wrestling. He was also the first to execute the move from the top rope. Originally, John Cena's FU was a Death Valley driver, but the move has since changed into more of a fireman's carry slam. Independent star Brock Singleton uses a variation from a flapjack, propelling his opponent over his head, and then catching him on the way down with a Death Valley driver. The upside-down version of the Death Valley driver, made famous by NOAH's Kenta Kobashi, is called the burning hammer and is a brutal drop onto the head and neck. This upside-down version can also be converted into a DDT; this burning DDT is the move that New Japan's Curry Man (Christopher Daniels) calls his spicy drop. A variety of other popular moves have evolved from the original Death Valley driver, almost too many to list.

How it's done: Executing the Death Valley driver requires a bit of strength, since one wrestler will briefly carry the entire weight of his opponent on his shoulders. Starting with a standing fireman's carry, a wrestler will control one of his opponent's arms, and then scoop between his opponent's legs and hoist him up into the air. Like a fireman's carry, the opponent will be laying chest-first across the wrestler's shoulder blades, similar to the old airplane spin submission. Once a wrestler has an opponent firmly across his shoulder blades, he will cup the head and clutch inside his opponent's thigh to keep the opponent from wiggling free or sliding out the back into a crucifix or another counter. The controlling wrestler will then tip or jump sideways—in the direction of his opponent's head—and manipulate the fall such that the opponent strikes the mat first, usually on the back of the head or neck. □

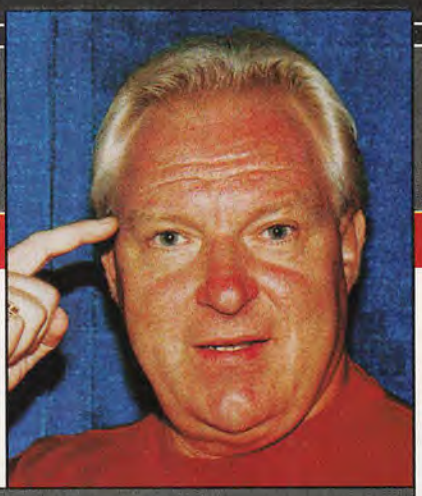
Louie Spicolli named his Death Valley driver after what else but ... himself!



check it out!

John Cena's FU—executed in the middle of the ring or off a turnbuckle—is more of a fireman's carry slam now, but it started as a Death Valley driver.

Photo by James McAfee



The Wrestling Observer

Hall of Fame

BOBBY HEENAN

In each issue, *PWI* will honor one member of the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame, which we recognize as the sport's official Hall of Fame

KNOWN ALTERNATELY AS "The Brain" and "The Weasel," depending on your point of view, Bobby Heenan was one of wrestling's most successful managers and most entertaining color commentators.

Heenan actually started as a wrestler, making his in-ring debut in 1965 against Calvin "Prince" Pullins. Though he showed some potential, he did his best work on the microphone and found his niche as a ringside manager.

Known as Pretty Boy Heenan, he led Nick Bockwinkel and Ray Stevens to tag team glory in the early-1970s. Flush with his success, he adopted the name "The Brain," a moniker that stuck for the rest of his career.

As he often pointed out later in his career, Heenan never officially retired as a wrestler and periodically donned the tights and got back into the ring, usually with disastrous results. However, he scored one of his biggest wins as a wrestler in September 1974, when he teamed with The Sheik to defeat Dick the Bruiser and Bobo Brazil in Chicago.

Heenan added his first world championship to his resume as a manager on November 8, 1975, when he guided Bockwinkel to the AWA title. Heenan and Bockwinkel would win that title together on three occasions. "The Brain" also led Blackjack Lanza and Bobby Duncum to the AWA World tag title in 1976.

After being given a one-year suspension by the AWA for constantly interfering in matches, Heenan moved on to Georgia Championship Wrestling. There he managed Lanza, Masked Superstar, and Killer Karl Kox before moving back to the AWA and reuniting with Bockwinkel.

In 1983, he suffered an injury that would plague him for years, breaking his neck during a tour of Japan. Heenan held off on getting surgery all the way until 1995. In 1984, he rebuilt the Heenan Family in the WWF, signing the federation's resident giant, Big John Studd. He later recruited King Kong Bundy and Ken Patera and launched feuds with Andre the Giant and Hulk Hogan.

Heenan was a master at infuriating fans (whom he arrogantly called "humanoids") and was actually attacked by some a few times.

Bobby Heenan was never a great wrestler, not even 30 years ago. He was, however, a nasty guy who would bust open an enemy such as Pepper Gomez and show no remorse. Of course, he got busted open many times himself, too.

"The Brain" enjoyed his first major success as a manager not in the WWF, but in the old AWA, where he led fellow Hall of Famer Nick Bockwinkel to three World titles.

Capitalizing on his gift for gab and his improvisational skills, the WWF paired him with Gorilla Monsoon, and the two became the company's top announcing team.

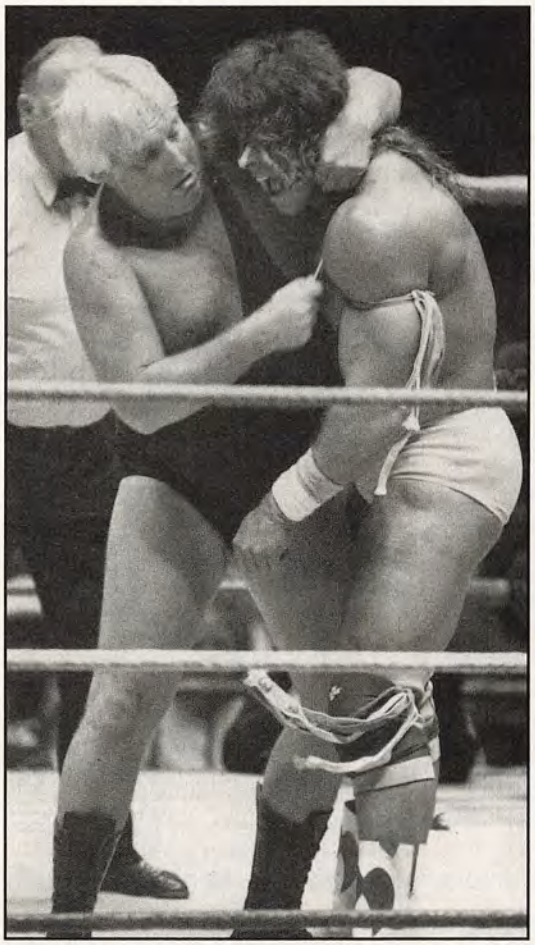
Heenan orchestrated Andre's heel turn against Hogan, setting the stage for WrestleMania III. However, no matter whom Heenan sent after Hogan, he couldn't wrest the WWF title from the "Hulkster." In fact, Heenan's first taste of WWF gold didn't come until 1989, when he helped Rick Rude upset The Ultimate Warrior for the Intercontinental title. He had considerably less success in the ring that night, losing to Terry "The Red Rooster" Taylor in just 32 seconds.

Heenan went on to guide Tully Blanchard and Arn Anderson and Andre and Haku to tag titles, and Hennig to the Intercontinental title. After retiring as a manager to become—*ahem*— a "broadcast journalist," he was lured back to ringside as Ric Flair's adviser and helped Flair win two WWF World titles.

Looking for a less taxing schedule and a very big payday, Heenan left the WWF for WCW in 1994. While in WCW, he concentrated exclusively on color commentary and traded barbs with Tony Schiavone and Lee Marshall, among others. In 1997, Indianapolis Mayor Steve Goldberg presented Heenan with a plaque, proclaiming April 3 as Bobby Heenan Day. But Heenan was very critical of WCW management during his stay there and was released in 2000.

He had brief stints with Women of Wrestling and the XWF in 2001, and appeared alongside his old pal Gene Okerlund to provide commentary for the gimmick battle royal at WrestleMania X7. Heenan is the only wrestling personality named to the All-Madden Team (1989) and was voted Manager of the Year by the readers of *PWI* four times. In 2002, he released his memoirs, *Bobby "The Brain" Heenan: Wrestling's Bad Boy Tells All*, along with Steve Anderson. He and Anderson recently finished a second book, which covers Heenan's battle with throat cancer, among other topics.

Heenan was inducted into the *Wrestling Observer* Hall of Fame in 1996. □



A big mouth can get you in a lot of trouble, as Heenan found out when he was occasionally forced to wrestle in the WWF. Even with foreign object in hand, did he really stand a chance against The Ultimate Warrior?

Tears welled up in Heenan's eyes in March, when, while accepting induction into the WWE Hall of Fame in March, he mentioned how he wished his old broadcast partner Gorilla Monsoon was still alive to see him get honored.

independent roundup

By Liz Hunter

CHRISTOPHER DANIELS made history by winning the eighth annual Super 8 Tournament on April 3 in Wilmington, Delaware. With his win, Daniels became the first competitor to win the tournament twice, having won the 2000 event as well. He had also come close to winning it in 1999, losing in the finals to **Steve Bradley**. This year's tournament featured a truly international flavor, with the famed **Nicho** (formerly **Psicosis**) competing among six of the best independent cruiserweights in America. The remaining competitors were **Austin Aries**, **Mike Kruel**, **John Walters**, **Shawn Daivari**, and both **Havana Pit Bulls**, **Ricky Reyes** and **Rocky Romero**. **Tyson Dux** was scheduled to compete, but suffered a torn ACL just a few weeks prior to the tournament while wrestling **Mark Jindrak** at a *Velocity* taping. Daivari was chosen as his replacement.

"Fallen Angel" Christopher Daniels holds the ECWA Super 8 trophy for a second time. Daniels won the annual cruiserweight tournament, proving that he is still the best independent wrestler in North America.

In a strange turn of events, Kruel, reigning East Coast Wrestling Association heavyweight champion, was pinned in the semifinal round by Daniels. After the match, Kruel voluntarily gave up the belt to Daniels, saying that since Daniels defeated him, he was the true champion.

For more on the Super 8, please turn to page 86.

New NWA-TNA star **Dallas** is already making news. Formerly known as **Shadow** on the Texas indy scene, Dallas won the NWA tag team title with **Kid Kash** in a tournament that concluded on March 31 ... Long-time NWA Wildside star **Rick Michaels** has reportedly signed with WWE, which is a loss for independent wrestlers everywhere. Michaels made quite a side business out of designing the ring gear for some of the most prominent indy wrestlers today ... **Preston Quinn** announced his retirement immediately after losing the NWA Virginia belt to **The Barbarian** ... NWA Wildside has announced that its weekly TV program will now be available on the Internet through the Wildside Web site. The Web cast will be nearly TV quality and commercial free.

Jasmin St. Claire recently underwent emergency surgery for a ruptured appendix. This forced the cancellation of the March 3PW show. Jasmin is now fine, and the promotion is back to its regular schedule... Both **Deuce Rodriguez** and **Rick Styles** dropped loser-leaves-town matches on a recent Tornado Pro Wrestling show in Oklahoma ... Rochester Pro Wrestling's **Sweet Lou** lost a loser-must-retire match.

Former NWA champion and WWE competitor **Dan Severn** has opened a new promotion, Midwest Wrestling Alliance, in conjunction with his new training facility, "The Beast Academy," located in Coldwater, Michigan ... Who were the druids with The Undertaker at WrestleMania XX? They were none other than IWF and Chaotic wrestlers **Roman**, **Fred Sampson**, **Kevin Knight**, **Chad Wicks**, **Ken Phoenix**, John Walters, **Johnny Heart-**

breaker, Vince Vicallo, and Arch Kincaid.

AWA heavyweight champion Evan Karagias was recently spotted in both *People* and *Entertainment Weekly* magazines in ads for the new TV show *Get A Life*. Karagias can also be seen playing the role of a journalist in the upcoming movie *Undercover Kids*. Fans might not recognize him, as he has shed his trademark dreadlocks for a closer-cropped hairdo.

And, finally, after failing to win the Power Championship Wrestling (Ohio) tag team title from The Kleptomaniacs, Hokie and Pokie vowed to the crowd that they would turn themselves around. No word yet if they were successful.

Quick title changes ***(promotion, town, date): Supreme Championship Wrestling, Madison, IN, March 31:*** Roger Blade and Eric Draven defeated tag team champions Billy Maverick and Jamie Morrison to win the title ... ***American Wrestling Alliance, Holton, IN, March 28:*** Roger Blade and Eric Draven beat Chuck McRoberts and Jamie Morrison to win the tag team title in a Texas tornado death match ... ***New Age Wrestling Alliance, Tyler, TX, March 28:*** Andy Dalton and Sean Cordova beat Cope and Hagen to win the tag title ... ***NWA East, McKeesport, PA, March 27:*** Mad Mike defeated Nikita Allanov by submission to become the new heavyweight champion ... ***Down South Championship Wrestling, Bolivar, TN, March 27:*** O.D.B. beat Christie Ricci and Tracy Brooks to win ladies title ... ***CWF Mid-Atlantic, Ramseur, NC, March 27:*** Brass Munkey and American Steel Ninja defeated Brad Attitude and Brad Rainz to win the tag team title ... ***PWF Northeast, Webster, MA, March 27:*** Kyle Storm defeated Johnny Curtis to win the heavyweight title ... ***Christian Wrestling Federation. Rockwall, TX, March 27:*** Slam Shady pinned Texas heavyweight champion Jeremy Young to win the title ... ***NWA Wildside, Cornelia, GA, March 27:*** Jason Cross beat Caprice Coleman to win the vacant TV title ... ***World of Hurt Wrestling Hudson Falls, NY, March 26:*** The Masked Duo defeated Danger and Nick Neighborhood to win the tag team title ... ***NWA Wildside, Cornelia, GA, March 26:*** Rick Michaels beat Jason Blackman to win the U.S. title ... ***"Brawl For Braxton" multipromotional show, Detroit, MI, March 21:*** Gutter defeated Frankie the Face to win the Independent Wrestling Revolution king of the indies and Michigan Marquee Wrestling Association marquee titles; Kamikaze won the "Raging Rumble" match to become the "Brawl For Braxton" champ; Truth Martini and Anthony Rivera defeated The Bump-N-Uglies to become the Independent Wrestling Revolution tag team champs ... ***Rochester Pro Wrestling, Rochester, NY, March 21:*** Gabe Saint defeated kayfabe dojo champion Jimmy Olsen to win the title ... ***Southern Wrestling Alliance, Mount Airy, NC, March 20:*** MIBs defeated Wicked Cash to win the vacant tag title; Big Daddy Cole defeated Ric Converse for the vacant Southern States title; Gary Stevens defeated Shane West for the vacant SWA championship ***Ultimate Championship Wrestling, Bay City, MI, March 20:*** The New Rock 'n' Roll Express defeated Mayhem in the finals of a tournament to declare the inaugural tag team champs ... ***New York Wrestling Connection, Deer Park, NY, March 20:*** The Grim Reefer won a three-way match against Dickie Rodz and Dan Barry to become the new light heavyweight champion ... ***NWA Florida, St. Petersburg, FL, March 20:*** Todd Shane won the heavyweight championship from Steve Madison; Mike Sullivan won the NWA Southern heavyweight championship from Steve Corino ... ***Just Plain Wrestling, Millington, TN, March 19:*** Family of Pain defeated The Untouchables to win the tag team title; Danny B. Good beat Carnage Antwan to win the heavyweight title ... ***Coastal Real Extreme Wrestling, Williamston, NC, March 13:*** Adrian Whisper beat Timber in a cage match to win the heavyweight title ... ***Chaotic Wrestling, Methuen, MA, March 12:*** New England champion Arch Kincaid beat John Walters to win the heavyweight title. □

NWA Florida has a new Southern champion. Mike Sullivan defeated Steve Corino for the belt on March 20 in St. Petersburg, Florida.

the international report

By Mike Spillane

AMERICAN INDEPENDENT WRESTLERS have made a bigger mark on the international scene during the last year than they ever have before, and the crowning moment has to be the recent title win by **American Dragon** and **Curry Man (Christopher Daniels'** masked alter ego) over IWGP junior tag team champions **Gedo** and **Jado**. Dragon, who spent the majority of 2003 in Great Britain training and wrestling, has been appearing off and on with New Japan Pro Wrestling. His ascension to international stardom came as no surprise to those that watched the impressive young grappler in his first years out of the **Shawn Michaels** Wrestling Academy.

Curry Man, a fan favorite in Michinoku Pro for years, has become a semi-regular with New Japan, thanks to his strong performances at both the 2000 Super J Cup and the subsequent Best of the Super Juniors round robin. Both men can be found atop just about any listing of the best independent wrestlers active today. Together, however, they have added their names to the record books as the first American duo to ever hold the IWGP junior tag team title. Following in the footsteps of past championship teams like **Shinjiro Otani** and **Tatsuhito Takaiwa**, **Minoru Tanaka** and **Koji Kanemoto**, and **El Samurai** and **Jushin Liger**, Curry Man and American Dragon will be up against the many of the finest junior heavyweights in the world, all vying for the prestigious title.

With the slump major wrestling companies have experienced in recent years, the role of the independents as the training ground for the next wave of stars is most critical. It's not just American independents that are key at this stage, but freelancers from around the world. Japanese star **Nosawa** has been popping up all over the globe, from Mexico City to Music City U.S.A. (Nashville). He's made appearances in NWA-TNA as well as in EMLL and a host of other Mexican promotions. British heavyweight **Nigel McGuinness** has found stardom in the Midwest, where his slick, technical style has made him a favorite of Heartland Wrestling Association fans in between trips to his native England. Dutch grappler **Emil Sitoci** has been touring the States since last summer and was scheduled to conclude his tour in the spring, having appeared with groups like CCW and IWA Mid-South.

The recent success of visiting Luchadores in NWA-TNA has opened the doors for more international stars to make their way onto the American stage. Along with popular Mexican stars like **Hector Garza**, **Abismo Negro**, and **Juventud Guerrera**, TNA has recently featured Osaka Pro sensations **Kuishinbo Kamen** and **Ebbesan**, two high-flying clowns known for their crazy matches as much as for their wild ring uniforms. As a result of this talent exchange, TNA stars like **Michael Shane** and **David Young** have had the chance to compete for AAA in Mexico, and most recently, a AAA show in Nuacalpan was headlined by a singles match between **Latin Lover** and **Jeff Jarrett**, which drew a crowd of more than 18,000.

American Dragon and Christopher Daniels—occasional rivals on the independent circuit in the United States—made a little history together in Japan recently when they became the first American duo to capture the IWGP junior tag title.

Jarrett retained his NWA title at El Toreo in a heated bout that had the crowd whipped into a frenzy. Originally, Jarrett's opponent was scheduled to be AAA's version of **La Parka**, but Parka gave the slot to Latin Lover after being seriously injured by a piledriver.

Jarrett's NWA title isn't the only one being defended in Mexico. **Vampiro** is recognized as NWA lightweight champion in Mexico, and he regularly defends the gold in EMLL against other wrestlers in his weight class. However, his recent title match against the popular **Black Warrior** came to a rather unusual conclusion. Vampiro seemed to have things going his way when, in mid-match, he simply took his belt and walked out of the ring, through the exit, and right out of the building. Backstage reports indicated he returned later in the evening and then left the building again. Mexican periodicals, which cover Lucha Libre regularly, labeled Vampiro's actions an embarrassment and called on the Lucha Commission to strip Vampiro of the title. So far, no public statement has been issued by either EMLL or the Commission.

Hiroyoshi Tenzan is a leading contender for a title held by **Toshiaki Kawada**. The title is not symbolized by a championship belt, but a moniker given by the fans of *puroresu:* "Tough Luck." In years gone by, All-Japan's Kawada has earned the nickname for his succession of incredible wins followed by terrible misfortune. In the last year, though, the same kind of luck has befallen New Japan's Tenzan. Tenzan has won the IWGP heavyweight title twice recently, and both times the title slipped away from him almost instantly. First he was upset by rookie wrestler/veteran martial artist **Shinsuke Nakamura** in a match that turned the *puroresu* world on its ear. Nakamura, however, was injured in a subsequent fight and had to vacate the title. Then Tenzan won the ensuing tournament, proving to many of his long-time supporters that Nakamura was nothing more than a fluke champion.

Yet, almost immediately, Tenzan was unseated by the returning **Kensuke Sasaki**, who took the title in Tokyo. Sasaki, who left New Japan to join **Riki Choshu's** World Japan Pro group more than a year ago, has since re-evaluated his options, as WJ Pro has crumbled. Tenzan, like Kawada, is respected for his hard work and dedication by both wrestlers and fans, but streaks of bad luck have marred both men's careers at crucial junctures.

Sasaki won the IWGP title three times in the past, but he never managed to establish himself as New Japan's top dog while he was champion. Instead, he has always been considered inferior to technical wizards like **Yuji Nagata** and favorites like **Masa Chono**. Accompanied by his wife, **Akira Hokuto**, and veteran **Genichiro Tenryu**, Sasaki was looking to change that perception and show how dominant he could be. But barely two weeks after winning the IWGP belt from Tenzan (and just before press time for this issue), Sasaki was upset by **Bob Sapp**, who defeated him in less than nine minutes on March 28. Perhaps Sasaki can also challenge for that "Tough Luck" moniker.

That's Kensuke Sasaki and Akira Hokuto looking very happy on their wedding day in 1995. Now Mrs. Sasaki, one of the top women wrestlers of her generation, has been challenged to an intergender match by Kendo Ka Shin. Was it just a ploy by Ka Shin to get a shot at the IWGP heavyweight title?

In addition to trying to position himself for a rematch with Sapp, Sasaki might also have to deal with **Kendo Ka Shin**. In an almost comedic move, Ka Shin, a junior heavyweight star from All-Japan, challenged *Hokuto* to a match. One of the most revered female wrestlers of all-time, Hokuto has been semi-retired for some time. Since intergender matches in Japan are extremely uncommon, many fans expect Sasaki to step up and put Ka Shin in his place ... but perhaps that was exactly what Ka Shin had in mind when he made the challenge.

A quick, agile wrestler with advanced knowledge of mixed martial arts, Ka Shin might have wanted to use Sasaki's pride to maneuver himself into position for an IWGP title shot. (He has not been affiliated with New Japan since the exodus of a few years back led by **Keiji Muto**.) That challenge was made before Sasaki lost the IWGP championship to Sapp, however, so it will be interesting to see if Ka Shin continues to pursue Sasaki and his wife. □

arena reports

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Spotlight Card of the Month

DETROIT, MI—*WWE Sunday Night Heat* taping/*Raw* live broadcast at Joe Louis Arena: **Travis Tomko** defeated **Lenny Lane** ... **Garrison Cade** beat **Val Venis** ... **Lita** pinned **Jazz** ... **The Hurricane** beat **Joey Matthews** ... **Matt Hardy** pinned **Lance Storm** ... **Chris Jericho** defeated **Rene Dupree** ... **Kane** pinned **Rico** ... **Christian** pinned **Spike Dudley** ... **Batista** & **Ric Flair** defeated Raw tag team champions **Booker T** & **Rob Van Dam** to win the title ... Raw champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **Rhyno** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** defeated **Triple-H** by disqualification.
(03-22-04)

—"Spotlight" photos by Claus Andersen

UNITED STATES

ALABAMA

BIRMINGHAM—Global Championship Wrestling at the Clay Middle School: **Inhuman Fly** beat **Kato** ... **Vinny V** beat **J.J. Steele** ... **The Dragon** beat **Icarus** ... **Theodore Tutweiler III** beat **Rastus Polk** ... **Mason Fury** beat **NightProwler** ... **Buff Bagwell** beat **Dan Sawyer**.
(03-19-04)

—Jerica Lyons

CALIFORNIA

HAYWARD— All Pro Wrestling at the APW Garage: **Chris Colione** defeated **Jimmy Ripp** by reverse decision ... **Billy Blade, Kaden,** & **Payton** defeated **Larry Blackwell, Lance Chandler,** & **Tiffany** ... **Jardi Frantz** pinned **J.T. Hyatt** ... The gauntlet blitz was declared a no-contest after **The Westside Playaz** defeated **Rush Hour** but refused to compete against **The Beach Boyz** ... Internet champ **J.J. Perez** defeated **Cheerleader Melissa** by submission ... Universal champ **James Watkins** pinned **Vennis DeMarco**.
(03-27-04)

—Brandon Shearer

DELAWARE

WILMINGTON—East Coast Wrestling Association's eighth annual Super 8 Tournament at St. Matthew's Parish Hall: ***Quarterfinals:*** **Austin Aries** defeated **Shawn Daivairi** ... **Mike Kruel** defeated **Ricky Reyes** ... **Christopher Daniels** beat **Rocky Romero** ... **John Walters** beat **Nicho** ... ***Semifinals:*** Daniels pinned Kruel ... Aries beat Walters ... ***Finals***: Daniels defeated Aries to win the tournament ... ***Non-tournament matches:*** **Ace Darling** & **Striker** won a tag team battle royal ... Tag champs **The Valedictorians** beat **Ace Darling** & **Striker**.
(04-03-04)

—Dan Murphy

FLORIDA

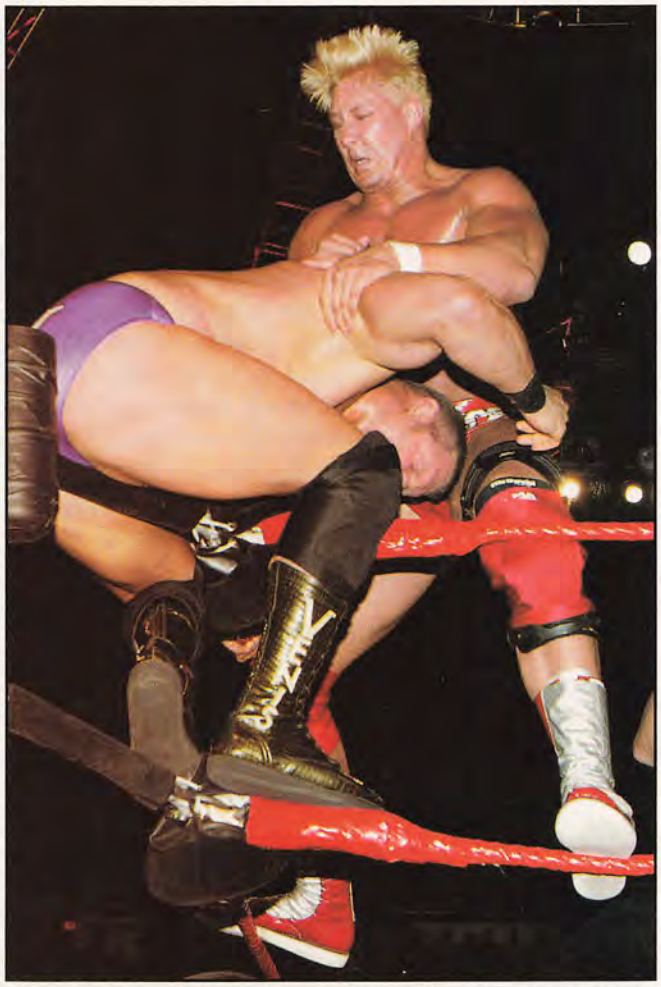
TAMPA—WWE at the USF Sun Dome: **Billy Kidman** & **Paul London** beat **The Basham Brothers** ... **Dennis Knight** beat **Steve Madison** ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Rey Misterio Jr., Spike Dudley,** and **Nunzio** in a four-way elimination match ... **Mark Jindrak** pinned **Billy Gunn** ... **Orlando Jordan** pinned **Charlie Haas** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Booker T** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** beat **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** ... **John Bradshaw Layfield** beat **Shannon Moore** ... U.S. champion **John Cena** defeated **Rene Dupree** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-28-04)

—Duane Long

BRANDON—NWA Florida at the All-Stars Facility: **Mikey Tenderfoot** defeated **Johnny Vandal** ... **O.G. Scarface** defeated **G.Q. Savagewood** and **Sedrick Strong** in a three-way dance ... **Erick Stevens** defeated **Lex Lovett** by disqualification ... **T-Bolt** & **Luther Jackson** defeated **Rick Thames** & **Sonny T** ... Tag team champions **David Mercury** & **Stash** defeated **Frankie Capone** & **Marcus Dillon** by disqualification ... NWA Southern heavyweight champion **Mike Sullivan** beat **Scoot Andrews** ... **Maximum Capacity** defeated **Bruce Steele** ... **Steve Madison** & **Bruiser Bradley** defeated **Todd Shane** & **Roderick Strong**.
(03-27-04)

—Lisa Macker

ST. PETERSBURG—NWA Florida at the Armory: **Mark Zout** & **James Hendrix** defeated **Michael Patrick** & **Killian** ... **Kevin Devine** defeated **Amy Love** ... **Justice** defeated **Sedrick Strong** ... **Cuban Assassin** & **Navy Seal** defeated **Daddy Pimp** & **Luther Jackson** ... **Bruce Steele** and **Lex Lovett** wrestled to a double-disqualification



Garrison Cade is doing fine—so far—without tag team partner Mark Jindrak, who was chosen in the lottery by Smackdown. He stopped Val Venis from hitting the money shot and rallied to score a *Heat* victory.

... **O.G. Scarface** defeated **Havok** and **Chaos** in a triple threat death match ... **Bruiser Bradley** defeated **Midian** ... **Mikey Tenderfoot** defeated **Scoot Andrews** ... **Todd Shane** won the heavyweight championship from **Steve Madison** ... X champion **Roderick Strong** defeated **Dan Maff** ... Tag team champions **Stash** & **David Mercury** defeated **Mikey Batts** & **Erick Stevens** ... **Mike Sullivan** defeated NWA Southern champion **Steve Corino** to win the title.
(03-20-04)

—Alan J. Wojcik

MILTON—High Impact Wrestling at the Santa Rosa Civic Center: **Maze** pinned **Chris Impact** ... **Brother Love** pinned **Vortex** ... **Damien LeVay** pinned **Jerry Reiner** ... **John Saxon** pinned **Malek Avalov** ... **Steve Armstrong** pinned **Kornbread** ... **Kevin Northcutt** pinned **Terry Bryant**.
(03-19-04)

—Kayla Jeannene

Jazz loves to get opponents into position for the STF. Unfortunately, the hold didn't do her much good against Lita on this night. Maybe she's missing Theodore Long's guidance already.

GEORGIA

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NWA Arena: **Skeeter Frost** beat **C.J. McManus** and **Scott Hotshot** ... NWA junior heavyweight champion **Jerrelle Clark** beat **Fast Eddie** ... **Jason Cross** beat **Caprice Coleman** to win the vacant TV title ... Tag champs **Todd Sexton** & **Masada** beat **Murder One** & **Slim J** ... **Matt Sydal** & **Delirious** beat **Jay Fury** & **Nick Halen** ... **Daizee Haze** beat **Jenny Taylor** and **Krissy Vaine** ... **A.J. Styles**, **Altar Boy Luke**, & **Gabriel** beat **Christopher Daniels**, **Rainman**, & **Azrael**.
(03-27-04)

—Larry Goodman

CORNELIA—NWA Wildside at the NWA Arena: **T.C. Carnage** & **Adam Roberts** beat **Preston Rage** & **Brent Silver** ... **Skeeter Frost** beat **Zero X** ... **Ace Rockwell** & **Sean Tempers** beat **Iceberg** & **Tank** by disqualification ... **Rick Michaels** beat **Jason Blackman** to win the U.S. title ... **A.J. Styles** beat **Seth Delay** ... **Jeremy V** & **Brandon P** beat **Shadow Jackson** & **Nemesis** ... **Christopher Daniels**, **Gabriel**, & **Altar Boy Luke** wrestled **Rainman**, **Azrael**, & **Mikal Adryan** to a no-contest.
(03-26-04)

—Larry Goodman

HARTWELL—IWA at the Middle School: U.S. champion **Phillip Pain** defeated **The Viper** ... **Lance Christopher** defeated Internet champion **James Boulevard** to win the title ... **J.T. Justice**, **Executioner**, & **Purple Passion**, defeated **Tommy Sawyer**, **Martin Lee**, & **Rahn Jordan** ... **Don Matthews** defeated **Billy Starr** ... **Panhead Nelson** defeated **The Tower**.
(03-13-04)

—John Bergman

ILLINOIS

PEORIA—Next Generation Wrestling at the Athletic Club: **Ric Brutal** beat **Elmer** ... **Ryan Phoenix** beat **The Great Puma** ... **Ray the Wrestler** and **Johnny Justice** wrestled to a no-contest ... **Chris Hazard** beat **Scott Keyes** ... **Chris Brown** beat **M.C. Trip C** ... **Big Pappa** & **Jester** beat **Apocalypse** & **Russ Stevens**
(03-27-04)

—Jason Pemberton

SUMNER—National Wrestling Coalition at Red Hill Junior High School: **The Violator** defeated **Rage** ... **Venom** beat **Hunter Long** ... **Kenny Shane** beat **Kid Capone** ... **The Intimidator** beat **Kid Crazy** ... **Moonpuppy** defeated **Miss B. Havin** ... Cruiserweight champion **Tommy Callaway** pinned **Steven Davis** ... **George the Animal Jr.** defeated **Super Destroyer** ... Tag team champions **The Oriental Express** defeated **Scorpio** & **T-Bolt Baxton** ... Heavyweight champion **Lucky Dane** and **Brian the Lion** wrestled to a double-disqualification.
(03-06-04)

—Brad Smithson

INDIANA

HOLTON—American Wrestling Alliance at the Holton Gym: **Chuck McRoberts** beat **Jamie Morrison** by disqualification ... **LiveWire** beat **Madd-Dawg Murphy** by submission ... **The Amazing Razz** pinned **MaTazz** ... Heavyweight champion **Spazz** beat **Cooter Clampett** by submission ... **Chris Blayze** pinned **Damien Morrus** ... **The Dysfunctional Family** beat **ESP** in a barbed-wire, kendo stick-on-a-pole, lumberjack-style ladder thumbtack death match ... **Roger Blade** & **Eric Draven** beat **Chuck McRoberts** & **Jamie Morrison** in a Texas tornado match to win the tag team title.
(03-28-04)

—Roger Bland

FORT WAYNE—WWE at the Allen County War Memorial Coliseum: **Rico** defeated **Horshu** ... **Steven Richards** beat **Lance Storm** ... **Batista** pinned **Val Venis** ... **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** beat **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** and **Rob Conway** & **Rene Dupree** in a three-way elimination match ... Women's champion **Victoria** defeated **Molly Holly** and **Jazz** in a three-way match ... **Christian** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... **Kane** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... Raw champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **Triple-H** by submission.
(03-21-04)

—Adam Rivers

LAWRENCEBURG—Power Championship Wrestling at Robinson Karate Dojo: **Curtis Robinson** defeated **Quinten Town** in a black belt challenge ... Mid-America champion **Mason the Mangler** defeated **Back Creek Sheik** ... Tag team champs **The Kleptomaniacs** beat **Hokie** & **Pokie** ... **Krissy Snow** wrestled **Debbie Derriere** to a no-contest ... Independent champion **Billy Maverick** defeated **Dark Star** & **Jesse Southerland** in a handicap match ... **Asmodeous** beat **Rage** in a flaming torch-on-a-pole match ... Heavyweight champion **Eric Draven** won a 15-man battle royal.
(03-21-04)

—Terrance Allen

DANVILLE—Ringside Wrestling Federation at the Hendricks County Fairgrounds: **Marty Graw** defeated **Ronnie Vegas** by disqualification... **American Masked Superstar** pinned **Johnny Sparks** ... **Skip Radisson** defeated **Rob Kincai** ... **The Bouncer** defeated **Hillbilly Jed** by disqualification ... **Itch Coma Weider** & **Marty Graw** defeated **Simply Spectacular** & **Kenny Courageous** ... **Johnnie Walker** pinned **Billy Bart** ... **Indiana Kidd Jr.** & **Shawn Cook** defeated **Devon Fury** & **P.T. Hussla**.
(03-13-04)

—Randy Klemme

HIGHLAND—IWA Mid-South at the Lincoln Center: **Emil Sitoci** beat **Trik Davis**, **Cru Jones**, and **Frankie the Face** in a four-way match ... **M-Dogg 20** & **Josh Prohibition** beat **Vito** & **Sal Thomaselli** ... **Tracey Smothers** beat **Conrad Kennedy III** ... **Ryan Boz** defeated **B.G. James** ... **Lacey** beat **Rain**, **O.D.B.**, **Daizee Haze**, **Mickie Knuckles**, and **Ms. Chif** in a six-way elimination match ... **Arik Cannon** defeated **Ian Rotten** ... **Steve Stone** beat **Zach Gowen** ... Light heavyweight champion **Matt Sydal** beat **Delirious** in a best-of-three-falls match ... Heavyweight champion **Jerry Lynn** defeated **Danny Daniels** ... **Spyder Webb** beat **J.C. Bailey** in a Texas death match.
(03-06-04)

—Michelle & Rachel Nixon

KANSAS

EUREKA—Bad Boys of Wrestling at Memorial Hall: **Karl Kruger** beat **J.C. Thunder** ... Heavyweight champion **J.M. Steele** beat **Tommy Snow** ... **Devan Scott** defeated **Danny Dane** ... **Pay Day** defeated **Symon Frost** ... **Anthony Pain** beat **Link** ... **J.C. Thunder**, **Link**, & **Danny Dane** beat **Karl Kruger**, **Devan Scott**, & **Anthony Pain** ... Kansas heavyweight champion **Jammer** defeated **Bigg Dogg**.
(03-20-04)

—Dan & Gina Adams

Fans of indy wrestling in North Carolina might have seen this match before ... before there was a Hurricane. Both Mr. Helms and his opponent, Joey Matthews, are products of that area.

KENTUCKY

LOUISVILLE—WWE at the Broadbent Arena: **Buh Buh Ray, D-Von,** & **Spike Dudley** defeated **Billy Kidman, Orlando Jordan,** & **Paul London** ... **Johnny Jeter** & **Sean O'Haire** beat **Nick Dinsmore** & **Inspector Impact** ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Nunzio** in a three-way elimination match ... **Mark Jindrak** pinned **Billy Gunn** ... **John Bradshaw Layfield** beat **Shannon Moore** ... **The Undertaker** pinned **Booker T** ... **Rob Van Dam** pinned **Charlie Haas** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** defeated **The Basham Brothers** and **Akio** & **Sakoda** in a three-way elimination match ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Rene Dupree** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-29-04)

—Tony Masters

GEORGETOWN—Prime Time Wrestling at the Convention Center: **Dick Dalton** won a three-way match against **Billy William** and **Mean Gene** ... **J.D. Escalade** & **Juggalator** beat **Bubba Steele** & **Al Steele** ... **Ice Train** beat cruiserweight champ **Kid Homicide** by disqualification ... U.S. champ **Cujo** wrestled **Jason Cross** to a double-disqualification ... Hardcore champ **Mike Roach** wrestled **Larry D** to a no-contest ... Heavyweight champ **Justen Idol** defeated **CellBlock 69**.
(03-27-04)

—Dwight Hinkley

MOUNT STERLING—Mountain Wrestling Association at Estil St. Jubilee: **Pompano Joe** beat **Mack the Knife** ... **Ice Train, Bobby Green,** & **Larry D** beat **Sheik Aftershock, Kasey Kaos,** & **Dick Dalton** ... **Tuffy** defeated **Mean Gene** to win light heavyweight title.
(03-27-04)

—Mike Carson

CARLISLE—NAW at the National Guard Armory: **Dr. Love** beat **Hellrazor** ... **Cujo** defeated **King Paul** and **Brian Williamson** in a three-way match ... **Sheik Aftershock** defeated **Jimmy Clough** ... **Lil Larry D** beat **Roach** by disqualification ... **Tuffy** beat **Mean Gene** ... **Sheik Aftershock** won a battle royal for the heavyweight title.
(03-26-04)

—Chris Smoot

ALTON—Central Wrestling Alliance at the Ruritan Club: **Jad T. Lungini** wrestled **Little Guido** to a time-limit draw ... Heavyweight champ **Mongoose** defeated **A.J. Vanity** and **Redneck Superstar** in a three-way dance ... **Raziel** defeated **J.T. Money** ... **Chopper** defeated **Syxe** ... **Scotty Da Body** & **Maddawg** defeated tag champs **Shane Lewis** & **Terry Alan** to win the title ... **Little Guido** won a battle royal.
(03-20-04)

—Eric Growley

BARDSTOWN—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Vic the Bruiser** wrestled **Billy Black** to a double-countout ... **Miami Mafia** defeated **Evil Intentions** ... **Billy Maverick** pinned **All Star** ... **Alister Fear** defeated **Maxx Mizery** to win the hardcore title ... Light heavyweight champion **Loco** won a four-way scramble match against **Menace, J.C. Bailey,** and **Simon Sezz**.
(03-20-04)

—Preston Wilson

BIG CLIFTY—Totally Lethal Wrestling at the Hornback Auction House: **Hardrock Higdon** pinned **All Star McStoots** ... **Derrick Neal** pinned **Joey Houston** ... **Jon Rock** defeated **Hex Hatred** ... Ironman champ **Rob G. Rock** pinned **Jail Break** ... **Vic the Bruiser** wrestled **J.C. Bailey** to a no-contest ... **Simon Sezz** defeated **Trent Richards** by disqualification.
(03-14-04)

—Tom Wood

BEDFORD—Bad 2 The Bone Wrestling at the Morgan Community Center: **K.C. Sabre** pinned **Devon Sabre** ... **Steve Marino** & **Apollo** wrestled to a double-countout with **Vito** & **Guido Andretti** ... **Menace** pinned **Maniac** ... Light heavyweight champion **Loco** pinned **Simon Sezz** ... Heavyweight champion **Vic the Bruiser** wrestled to a no-contest with **Billy Black** when the match was stopped due to excessive blood loss.
(03-06-04)

—Joe Bailey

MARYLAND

BALTIMORE—WWE at the 1st Mariner Arena: **Rico** defeated **Horshu** ... Women's champion **Victoria** pinned **Molly Holly** ... **Matt Hardy** beat **Nick Dinsmore** ... **Batista** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Raw tag team champions **Booker T** & **Rob Van Dam** beat **Rob Conway** & **Rene Dupree** and **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** in a three-way elimination match ... **Chris Jericho** beat **Christian** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **Test** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** defeated **Chris Benoit** and **Shawn Michaels** in a three-way match when he pinned Michaels.
(03-07-04)

—Walt Gaines

MASSACHUSETTS

WEBSTER—PWF Northeast at the Elks Lodge: **Jason Blade** defeated **Mike Paiva** & **T.J. Richter** in a handicap match ... **Ebony Blade** pinned **Grayson P. Alexander** ... **Valerie Dictorian** beat **Becky Bayless** ... **Evan Siks** pinned **Danny Demanto** ... **Jose Perez** & **Billy Black** defeated **Chris Camaro** & **Kid Mikaze** to win the tag team title ... **The Score** defeated **Matt, Bryan,** & **Nick Logan** ... **Kyle Storm** defeated **Johnny Curtis** to win the heavyweight title when special guest referee **Matt Storm** made a fast three-count.
(03-27-04)

—Marianne Mauer

METHUEN—Chaotic Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Hall: **Dr. Reginald Heresy** & **Andre Lyonz** beat **Handsome Johnny** & **Psycho** ... **Adam Booker** beat **Brandon Young** ... **Vince Vicallo** beat **Roman** ... **Brian Black** & **The Mighty Mini** beat **Peter Mulloy** & **Brian Buffet** to regain the tag team championship ... **Luis Ortiz** beat **Kenn Phoenix** ... New England champion **Arch Kincaid** beat **John Walters** to win the heavyweight championship.
(03-12-04)

—Rich Palladino

MICHIGAN

DETROIT—Multipromotional "Brawl at the Hall III: A Brawl For Braxton" benefit show at St. Andrew's Hall: **Mr. Insanity** beat **Elvis Elliot** ... **Klunk the Klown** & **Jaime D** beat **Bahdunk-a-dunk** & **Thurston Brooks** in an intergender match ... **Gutter** beat **Frankie the Face** to become the IWR

King of the Indies & MMWA marquee champ ... **Zach Gowen** beat **Danny Daniels** ... **Deranged** beat **The DBA**, **The Necro Butcher**, **George Morbid**, and **Brian Damage** in a five-way elimination match to retain the XICW X-treme title ... **Kamikaze** won the 25-man "Raging Rumble" match to become the first Brawl for Braxton champ ... **Truth Martini** & **Anthony Rivera** beat **The Bump-N-Uglies** to become the new IWR tag team champs ... **Sabu** beat **Monty Brown** ... **Al Snow** beat **Breyer Wellington** ... **Team IWR** beat **Team BCW** in a War Games-style cage match.
(03-21-04)

—Aaron McMann

BAY CITY—Ultimate Championship Wrestling at the Community Center: **Jayson Yang** beat **N8 Mattson** ... **P.J. Flowers** beat **El Diablo** ... **The Hatebreeder** & **Will the Eliminator** wrestled **The Titus Brothers** to a double-disqualification ... **Demolition Ax** beat **Ricco Rodriguez** by disqualification ... ***In a tournament to determine the first tag team champions, semifinals:*** **Mayhem** beat **Southern Pride** ... **The New Rock 'n' Roll Express** beat **The Extreme Outlaws** ... ***Finals:*** The New Rock 'n' Roll Express beat Mayhem to win the title.
(03-20-04)

—Aaron McMann

DEARBORN—Metro Pro Wrestling at the Al Matta Hall: **Petey Williams** beat **Prince Romeo** ... Hardcore champ **Buddy Hanlon** beat **The Syrian Playboy** ... **Klunk the Klown** wrestled **Jaime D** to a double-disqualification ... **Truth Martini** & **Anthony Rivera** beat tag team champs **Tommy Johnson** & **Kamikaze** to win the title ... **Chuck Wagon** beat **Whiplash** ... **Elvis Elliot** beat **Chris Clontz** ... **Dyson Pryce** beat heavyweight champion **Conrad Kennedy III** to win the title ... **Gutter** beat TV champ **N8 Mattson** in a steel cage match to win the title.
(03-13-04)

—Aaron McMann

WARREN—UWA at the VFW Post: Heavyweight champion **Bobo Brazil Jr.** defeated **Ronnie Vegas** ... **The ? Man** defeated junior heavyweight champion **Simply Badd** to win the title ... **The Cold Brothas** defeated **Renegades** in a non-title match ... **Smasher** and **No Nonsense** wrestled to a double-disqualification ... **The Fighting Americans** defeated **Help Wanted**.
(03-07-04)

—Aaron McMann

MINNESOTA

MAPLE GROVE—Midwest Pro Wrestling at Dan Schaffner Arena: **Brady A. Desire** beat **The Schoolboy** ... **Casavova** pinned **Icarus** ... **El Viejo** won a four-way elimination match against **Ben Sailer**, **Trik Davis** and **Gator Magraw** ... Cruiserweight champion **Kid Krazy** pinned **Eddie Kingston** ... Universal champion **Arik Cannon** defeated **Jimmy Jacobs** ... **Prettyboy Delgado** beat **Cody O'Neill** in a lumberjack match.
(03-27-04)

—Wayne McCarty

MINNEAPOLIS—Coast to Coast Wrestling Alliance at First Ave.: **Rain** pinned **Ann-Thraxx** ... **Mason Quinn** defeated **DOS** ... **Werhner Schurman** beat **Dick Dragon** ... Cruiserweight champion **Kaos** beat **Renegado Estrada** ... **Lenny Lane** pinned **Dan Jesser** ... **Ken Anderson** defeated **Shawn Daivari** ... **Shimdog** beat **Detroit Slim** to win the streetfight title.
(03-24-04)

—Wayne McCarty

MISSISSIPPI

INDIANOLA—NWA New South at the National Guard Armory: **Havok** beat **Scorpio** ... **Cody Mantell** beat **Kevin White** by disqualification ... **Black Jack Tatum** beat **Joe Cain** ... **Eric Rowland** & **Kid Kinevil** beat **Zeron** & **Krazy Dee** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Doug Gilbert** beat **Scott Starr**.
(03-27-04)

—Jake Kendrick

RIPLEY—Down South Championship Wrestling at the Tippah County Coliseum: **Deadly Dale** pinned **Jimmy Hall** ... **Criminyle** defeated **Loose Cannon** ... **Miss Natural** pinned **Hellena Heavenly** ... **Lord Humungous** defeated **Jimmy Hall** & **Big Indian** in a handicap match ... **Family of Pain** defeated **The Untouchables** ... **Criminyle** pinned **Deadly Dale** ... **Jimmy Valiant** & **Danny B. Good** defeated **Austin Lane** & **Neil Taylor**.
(03-13-04)

—Bryan Underwood

MISSOURI

ST. LOUIS—WWE at the Savvis Center: **Tajiri** defeated **Matt Hardy** ... **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Rob Conway** ... **Garrison Cade** pinned **Eugene** ... **Shelton Benjamin** defeated **Horshu** ... **Kane** beat **Rhyno** ... Women's champion **Victoria** beat **Nidia**, **Jazz**, and **Molly Holly** in a four-way elimination match ... Raw tag team champions **Batista** & **Ric Flair** defeated **The Hurricane** & **Rosey** ... **Christian** defeated **Chris Jericho** ... Raw champion **Chris Benoit** beat **Triple-H**.
(03-28-04)

—Kenneth Kerrigan

ST. LOUIS—GCW at Aggies': **MsChif** & **Jackal** defeated **Trainee Number 11** & **Trainee Number 14** ... **Richard Head** won a triple threat match against **Jynx** and **David Cox** ... **Heart Attack Jack** & **Bo Jangles** beat **The Super Castaldis** ... **Chris Hargas** defeated **Ian Storm** ... **OuTtKaSt** beat **Pete Madden** in a streetfight ... **Chaz Wesson** defeated **Madman Pondo** by disqualification ... **Nikki Strychnine** & **Dingo** wrestled **Kevin Sharp** & **Shawn Almighty** to a time-limit draw ... **Sean Vincent** pinned **Keith Smith** ... Heavyweight champion **Kory Twist** beat **Jeremy Lightfoot**.
(03-12-04)

—Patrick Brandmeyer

CAPE GIRARDEAU—WWE at the Show Me Center: **Tajiri** pinned **Matt Hardy** ... **Garrison Cade** pinned **Eugene** ... **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Rob Conway** ... **Shelton Benjamin** pinned **Horshu** ... **Kane** pinned **Rhyno** ... **Nidia** & **Victoria** beat **Molly Holly** & **Jazz** ... **Batista** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Christian** pinned **Chris Jericho** ... Raw champion **Chris Benoit** defeated **Triple-H**.
(03-27-04)

—Dutch Krewda

NEVADA

LAS VEGAS—Ultimate Wrestling Federation at the UWF Chamber: **Fredo** defeated **Vash Venom** ... **Funnybone** defeated **Brady A. Desire** ... **Fredo** defeated Nevada champion **Derek Duggan** for the title ... **Johnny Riggs** defeated **Mikey Wrath** in lumberjack match ... ***In an elimination match to declare a new heavyweight champion:*** **Funnybone** defeated **Sensational Shawn** ... **Shooting Star** defeated Funnybone ... **Brady A. Desire** beat Shooting Star ... **X** defeated Brady A. Desire ... **Tough Enough Kenny** defeated X to win the title.
(03-12-04)

—Shaun Daily

NEW HAMPSHIRE

MANCHESTER—WWE at the Verizon Wireless Arena: **Hardcore Holly** pinned **A-Train** ... **Billy Gunn**, **Billy Kidman**, & **Paul London** defeated **Chuck Palumbo**, **Nunzio**, & **Johnny Stamboli** ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Rhyno** ... **Bradshaw** & **Ron Simmons** beat **Akio** & **Sakoda** ... **Tajiri** pinned **Shannon Moore** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** beat **The Basham Brothers** and **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** in a three-way match ... **Torrie Wilson** defeated **Nidia (Funaki** was the guest referee) ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.**, **Jamie Noble**, and **Ultimo Dragon** in a four-way elimination match ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-15-04)

—Tom Iverson

NEW JERSEY

MANVILLE—National Wrestling Superstars at

Matt Hardy was just a little better than Lance Storm in a match between men who have to be wondering what they need to do to capture the attention of WWE Creative.

At least Rico got in a tiny bit of offense against Kane before being destroyed. Yes, the flamboyant one must have been grateful for the trade to Smackdown. He could use a gimmick overhaul, too.

VFW Post 2290: **Roman** pinned **Brandon Young** ... Junior heavyweight champion **Mike Kruel** beat **Ace Darling** ... **Biggie Biggs** & **Kevin Knight** defeated **Gavin Quest** & **Fast Eddie** ... **Jason Static** beat **Justice Cage** ... **TNT, Ice Pick,** & **The Patriot** defeated **The Baghdad Bullies** & **Chris Candido** in best-of-three-falls match.
(03-27-04)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

WEST PATERSON—IWF at the IWF Arena: American champion **Brandon Young** beat **Shane O'Brien** ... **Fred Sampson** pinned **Vik Voorhees** ... **Tony Torres** beat **Aaron Stride** ... Junior heavyweight champion **Sean Royal** defeated **Chris Steeler** ... **Biggie Biggs** & **Damian Adams** beat tag team champs **Shawn Donavan** & **Travis Blake** by countout ... **Kevin Knight** & **Fred Sampson** co-won a battle royal.
(03-21-04)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

WEST PATERSON—IWF at the IWF Arena: Junior heavyweight champion **Sean Royal** pinned **Dan McGuire** ... **Brian Buffet** beat **Vince Vicallo** ... **Fred Sampson** beat **Shane O'Brien** by disqualification ... American champion **Brandon Young** pinned **Vik Voorhees** ... Tag team champs **Shawn Donavan** & **Travis Blake** beat **Chris Steeler** & **Tony Torres** and **Aaron Stride** & **Jay Blaze** in a triple threat match ... **Biggie Biggs** beat heavyweight champion **Roman** by disqualification.
(03-20-04)

—Dorothy Podsvirow

ELIZABETH—Ring of Honor at the Rex Plex: **Amazing Red** defeated **Teddy Hart, Sonjay Dutt, Jimmy Rave, Jack Evans,** and **Mark Briscoe** in a six-man mayhem match ... **Xavier** defeated **Slyk Wagner Brown** ... **Jerry Lynn** defeated **Nigel McGuinness** ... **Matt Stryker** defeated **John Walters** ... **Dan Maff** & **B.J. Whitmer** wrestled **Colt Cabana** & **Ace Steel** to a no-contest ... Pure wrestling champion **A.J. Styles** defeated **C.M. Punk (Rick Steamboat** served as guest referee) ... Heavyweight champion **Samoa Joe** defeated **Jay Briscoe** in a steel cage match ... **H.C. Loc, DeVito, Justin Credible, Masada,** & **Dusty Rhodes** beat **Special K** in a scramble cage match.
(03-13-04)

—Meghann Farnes

NEW YORK

HUDSON FALLS—World of Hurt Wrestling at the Knights of Columbus Hall: **Damon Vitale** defeated **Justin Kidd** ... **Punk** defeated **Steve Kruz** ... **Timmy Tasteless** defeated **Danger** ... **Warpath** & **Virus** defeated **Jeff Starr** & **Shockwave** ... **Hoss** defeated **Chuck Deep** ... U.S. champion **Scott Scarsdale** won a three-way match against **Jim Tanner** and **Bert Williams** ... Heavyweight champ **Texas Outlaw** defeated **Thornn** ... **The Masked Duo** defeated **Danger** & **Nick Neighborhood** to win the tag team title. After they were declared champions, The Masked Duo removed their masks to reveal themselves as **Shane Alden** & **Swinger Sidusky**.
(03-26-04)

—Donna D'Angelo

ROCHESTER—Rochester Pro Wrestling at the Kayfabe Dojo: **Chills** & **Thrills** defeated **I.B. Green** & **Mark Steiner** ... **Gabe Saint** defeated kayfabe dojo champion **Jimmy Olsen** to win the title ... **Dicky Sanchez** defeated **Jake N' Bake** and **Bert Williams** in a triple threat match ... **Brodie Lee** defeated **Sweet Lou** in a loser-must-retire match ... **Shockwave** defeated **Fusion** ... **Bobby Shields** defeated **Colin Olsen** ... **The Ring Crew Express** defeated **The Osawa Syndicate** ... **The Natural Born Blonds** defeated **Big Cat, Evan McCloud,** & **Freddie Midnight** ... **Rik Matrix** defeated **The Texas Outlaw** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Charisma** defeated **Chip Stetson.**
(03-21-04)

—Todd Brantley

DEER PARK—New York Wrestling Connection at the Community Center: **Spyder** defeated **Joey Braggiol** ... **Nick Noshus** defeated **Damian Dragon** ... **Chief Dudley** defeated **Dan Dynasty** ... **Mike Mayhem** wrestled **Curse** to a no-contest ... **Mason Raige** defeated **Tony Burma** ... **Nuke** defeated **Mega** ... **Vinny Stylin'** defeated **Ken Scampi** ... Tag team champs **Ru Starr** & **Wayne** defeated **Danny Doring** & **Chris Chetti** ... **The Grim Reefer** won a three-way elimination match against interstate champion **Dickie Rodz** and **Dan Barry** to win the title ... **Mikey Whipwreck** & **Al Snow** defeated **Tyler Payne** & **Marty Jannetty.**
(03-20-04)

—Paul Quigley

ELMIRA—WWE at the First Arena: **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Rob Conway** & **Rene Dupree** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **Test** ... **Rico** defeated **Horshu** ... **Matt Hardy** pinned **Nick Dinsmore** ... **Chris Jericho** beat **Christian** ... **Batista** pinned **The Hurricane** ... Women's champion **Victoria** beat **Molly Holly** ... Raw tag team champions **Booker T** & **Rob Van Dam** defeated **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Chris Benoit** and **Shawn Michaels** in a three-way match when he pinned Michaels.
(03-06-04)

—Frank Miller

SYRACUSE—WWE at the War Memorial Arena: **Buh Buh Ray** & **D-Von Dudley** beat **Rob Conway** & **Rene Dupree** ... **Steven Richards** pinned **Test** ... **Rico** defeated **Horshu** ... **Matt Hardy** beat **Nick Dinsmore** ... **Batista** pinned **The Hurricane** ... **Chris Jericho** defeated **Christian** ... Women's champion **Victoria** beat **Molly Holly** ... Raw tag team champions **Booker T** & **Rob Van Dam** defeated **Garrison Cade** & **Mark Jindrak** ... Raw champion **Triple-H** beat **Chris Benoit** and **Shawn Michaels** in a three-way match.
(03-05-04)

—Steve Drew

NORTH CAROLINA

ROCKINGHAM—World Class Extreme Wrestling at the Richmond County Rescue Squad: **Truitt Fields** beat **Ali Steele** by disqualification ... **Tyrone Knox** & **Ouga Bouga** beat **Kid Evil** & **Chi Chi Crazy** ... **Indian Outlaw** defeated **Justin Feechie** ... New Class champion **Steve Michaels Studdly** wrestled **Hangtime** to a draw ... **The Dream Lovers** beat **East Coast Bodily Harm** by disqualification ... **Aaron Devil** & **Dark Angel** defeated **Ouga Bouga** & **G.Q. Studdly** ... Heavyweight champion **The Stro** won a five-man gauntlet, beating **Draven, R Roc, Zane Dawson** and **Ali Steele.**
(03-27-04)

—Ciara & Texas Patton

MOUNT AIRY—Southern Wrestling Alliance at the National Guard Armory: **Shane West** won a gauntlet match over **Corey Edsel, Ironhorse,** and **Ric Converse** ... **MIBs** defeated **Wild Eyed Southern Boys** ... **Wicked Cash** defeated **J-Money** & **American Shadow** ... **Gary Stevens** won a gauntlet match over **Big Daddy Cole, Crybaby Chris,** and **American Shadow** ... **MIBs** defeated **Wicked Cash** to win the vacant tag title ... **Big Daddy Cole** defeated **Ric Converse** for the vacant Southern States title ... **Gary Stevens** defeated **Shane West** for the vacant SWA championship .
(03-20-04)

—Tara Rheaume

WILMINGTON—ICW Pro Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Insane Shane** beat **Zane Dawson** ... **East Coast Bodily Harm** beat **Aaron Devil** & **Steve Michaels** ... **Leo Alure** beat **Chance** ... **Dave Renegade** beat **Creeping Death** ... **Dark Starr** & **Solitude** beat **BloodLust** & **D.J. P-Roc** ... **Anti-Hero League** beat tag champions **The Dream Lovers** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Marc Ash** beat **Duke Richards.**
(03-20-04)

—Marcus Watkins

WILLIAMSTOWN—Coastal Real Extreme Wrestling at the National Guard Armory: **Deacon** beat **Red** ... **Chris Escobar** beat **Shane Falco** ... **Max Cortez** beat **Genisis** ... **Lotus** beat **Gluteus Maximus** ... **Justin Feechie** beat **Ouga Bouga** ... **Marty Reed** beat **Jon-Jon the Phenomenon** ... **Damien Wayne** & **Mike Booth** beat **Brandon Day**

in a handicap match ... **Adrian Whisper** beat **Timber** in a cage match to become the new heavyweight champion.
(03-13-04)

—John Medlin

OHIO

NEW LEXINGTON—Power Championship Wrestling at Bid-Rite Auction Center: **Quinten Towne** defeated **Diablo** in a shootfight rules match ... **Freaky Komadina** pinned **Brandon Hunter** in a loser-wears-a-dress match ... Mid-America champion **Mason the Mangler** defeated **Dick Doom** in a weapons match ... Tag team champs **The Kleptomaniacs** beat **Senior Cooter** & **Johnny Bravo** ... **Krissy Snow** wrestled **Debbie Derriere** to a no-contest ... Independent champion **Billy Maverick** defeated **Holden Yurin** in a scaffold match ... Heavyweight champion **Eric Draven** defeated **Billy James** by disqualification.
(03-28-04)

—Terrance Allen

CLEVELAND—Cleveland All Pro Wrestling at Turner's Hall: **The Bouncer** defeated **The Basket Nazi** by disqualification ... **Ironman** defeated **Sinn** ... **Phoenix** and **Angel Williams** wrestled to a draw ... **Tracey Smothers** defeated **J.T. Lightning** ... Tag champs **Sheik Hassan** & **DisCole Fever** defeated **Adam Cage** & **H8 Pac** ... Junior heavyweight title gauntlet match: **M-Dogg 20** defeated **Tyson Bishop** ... **Jason Turner** defeated M-Dogg 20 ... **Dios Salvador** defeated Jason Turner to retain the junior heavyweight title and win the gauntlet ... **Raymond Rowe** defeated heavyweight champ **Chad Collyer** to win the title ... TV champ **Jason Bane** defeated **Chris Hamrick**.
(03-21-04)

—Billy Madlsen

OKLAHOMA

SAPULPA—Steel Rage Pro Wrestling at Sapulpa Boys' & Girls' Club: **Cade Sydal** beat **Trey Christian** ... **Dexter Hardaway** beat **Kenny Campbell** ... **Luc Lapointe** beat light heavyweight champion **X-Cal** in a non-title match ... **Shane Morbid** won a battle royal.
(03-19-04)

—Kerry Wilson

PENNSYLVANIA

McKEESPORT—NWA East at the Sportatorium: **Daron Smythe** & **Jason Cage** defeated **Kid Cupid** & **Scott Venom** ... **Bigg** defeated **Scottie Gash** ... **Justin Idol** wrestled **Crusher Hansen** to a no-contest ... Three Rivers champion **Lance Dayton** pinned **Adam Cage** ... **Quinn Magnum** beat **Devin Devine** by countout ... **Da Munchies** defeated **The Tri Chi Fraternity** in a tornado tag match and won the right to paddle **Benjamin C. Steele** ... **Chris Taylor** pinned **Brandon K** ... **Mad Mike** defeated **Nikita Allanov** by submission to become the new heavyweight champion.
(03-27-04)

—Wally Bingham

LATROBE—Far North Wrestling at the Elks Lodge: **Jigsaw** pinned **Dr. Feelgood** ... Cruiserweight champion **Phoenix** beat **Joey Knight** ... **Mike Quackenbush** beat **Kevin Grace**, **Dennis Gregory**, and **Jimmy Vegas** in a four-way elimination match to capture the vacant freeweight title ... **Larry Zbyszko** beat **Dean Jablonski** ... **Lord Zoltan** pinned **Joe Integra** ... **Hallowicked** & **The Wild Cards** (**Eddie Kingston** & **Blackjack Marciano**) beat **Mike Quackenbush**, **Jolly Roger**, & **Gran Akuma** ... Heavyweight champion **T. Rantula** beat **Dirk Ciglar** in a table match.
(03-26-04)

—Timothy A. Walker

ALTOONA—Keystone Championship Wrestling at the KCW Arena: **Xander Graves** pinned hardcore champ **Trevor Michaels** to win the title ... **Bobby Shields** pinned **Chris LeRusso** ... **Dr. Feelgood** pinned **Zubov** ... **Bill Bain** pinned **Big Lenny** ... Central Pennsylvania champ **Scott Fowler** and **Sebastian** wrestled to a double-knockout in a stretcher match ... **Dave Daniels** beat **Doug Diggler** in an "I Quit" match ... **Da Munchies** beat tag team champs **X-Treme** by disqualification ... **Julio Dinero** pinned **Brock Singleton** ... **Charlie Mansun** pinned **Mercury Flash** ... **Bubba Brewer** beat heavyweight champ **Kasanova Kato** in a first-blood match to win the title.
(03-20-04)

—Matt Bish

EMMAUS—CHIKARA at Fire Company #1: **Shane Storm** & **Private Eye** defeated **Darkness Crabtree** & **Phantasmo** ... **Joker** pinned **Sabien** ... **Jigsaw** won a six-man gauntlet match that also involved **D.J. Skittlez**, **UltraMantis**, **Fumar Dos**, **John Brooks**, and **Mister ZERO** ... **Jolly Roger** beat **Rorschach** ... **Gran Akuma**, **Icarus**, & **Mike Quackenbush** defeated **Hallowicked**, **Jack Marciano**, & **Eddie Kingston** by disqualification when Kingston unmasked Akuma.
(03-20-04)

—Joe Vincent

HAMBURG—World Wide Wrestling Alliance at the Field House: **Bodacious Brad** defeated **New Wave** ... **Nick Berk** defeated **Jo Jo** ... **Fantasia** pinned **Summer Heat** ... Women's champion **Tiffani Monroe** Pinned **Fantasia** ... Heavyweight champ **Glen Osbourne** defeated **Draven Blaze** ... **The Wolfman** defeated **Z Barr** ... **Extreme Fahrenheit** defeated **Untouchabulz** to win the vacant tag title ... **Demerious Arion** and **Shane Shadows** wrested to a double-countout ... **Johnny Law** wrestled **Johnny Graham** to a no-contest.
(03-20-04)

—Gina Joseph

WEST MIFFLIN—International Wrestling Cartel at the CCAC South Campus Gymnasium: **Troy Lords** beat **Glenn Spectre** ... **Tracey Smothers** & **Chris Hamrick** defeated **Jimmy Jacobs** & **Fabulous** ... **Jake Garrett** pinned **Mickey Gambino** ... **Shirley Doe** & **Mahoney** defeated **Sebastian Dark** & **Soldier** ... **Chris Candido** & **New Jack** beat **Bubba the Bulldog**, **Jimmy Vegas**, & **Dennis Gregory** in a streetfight ... Tag team champions **M-Dogg 20** & **Josh Prohibition** beat **The Ring Crew Express** ... **Dean Radford** pinned heavyweight champion **Sterling James Keenan** to win the belt ... ***In the first round of a special mini-tournament to determine the number-one seed in the Super Indy Tournament:*** **A.J. Styles** pinned **C.M. Punk** ... Super Indy champ **Colt Cabana** beat **Super Hentai** ... ***Tournament final:*** Styles pinned Cabana to win the Super Indy belt and become the number-one seed for the 2004 tournament.
(03-20-04)

—Timothy A. Walker

SUMMIT HILL—Int'l Pro Wrestling at Panther Valley High School: **Gran Akuma** & **Icarus** defeated **The Wild Cards** ... **Julio Dinero** defeated **The Patriot** ... **Little Jeannie** beat **Bobcat** ... **Sonjay Dutt** pinned **Ruckus** ... **Hosaka Sato** beat **Doug Flex** by countout ... Cruiserweight champion **Mike Quackenbush** pinned **Hallowicked** ... Heavyweight champion **Tom Brandi** beat **The Hungarian Barbarian** after

Batista really does look like a beast at times. Look at the way he seems to be circling his prey—Booker T. He and Ric Flair beat Booker T and RVD to regain the Raw tag title.

Raw champion Chris Benoit and Rhyno had a brief feud on the Smackdown side last year, so both had to be well aware of the other's tendencies, strengths, and weaknesses. Benoit retained his title via Crippler crossface.

Julio Dinero interfered ... **Jerry Lawler** pinned **Al Snow.**
(03-19-04)

—Ricky Miller

HANOVER—Ground Breaking Wrestling at 34 Broadway Ballroom: **Jason Maximum** pinned **Apollo Cruise** ... **Ian Cross** defeated **Simon Ryme** ... **Blaine Barret** beat **Ryan Phenix** ... Breaker champion **J.T. Roberts** beat **Core** in a no-disqualification match ... **Hardcore Mafia** defeated **The New Jersey All-Stars** ... **Scott Adams** beat **Matt Skills** by disqualification ... Heavyweight champion **Travis D** defeated **Ronald Wake** ... ***Gauntlet match:*** **Simon Ryme** pinned **Jason Maximum** ... **J.T. Roberts** pinned Simon Ryme ... **Blaine Barret** pinned **Apollo Cruise** ... **Quinn Nash** pinned **Core** ... Blaine Barret pinned J.T. Roberts ... **Mr. Excellent** pinned Blaine Barret ... **Quinn Nash** pinned Mr. Excellent to win the match.
(03-13-04)

—Joey Briggs

SOUTH CAROLINA

ANDERSON—IWA at the National Guard Armory: Internet champion **Lance Christopher** defeated **The Viper** ... **Tommy Sawyer** defeated **James Boulevard** ... Tag team champions, **Billy Starr** & **Panhead Nelson** won a three-way match against **Executioner** & **Purple Passion** and **Don Matthews** & **The Tower** ... U.S. champion **Phillip Pain** defeated **Derrick Ravage** ... Heavyweight champion **Rahn Jordan** defeated **Casey J.**
(03-20-04)

—Peter J. Donavan

SOUTH DAKOTA

RAPID CITY—Ultra Championship Wrestling at the UCW Arena: **Prodigy** pinned **Tony Morales** ... Heavyweight champ **Gryphon** pinned **Ben Van Dyke** ... **Bruiser Bennett** defeated **Donnie Peppercricket** by submission ... **Shane Lyes** pinned **Preston Maxwell** ... U.S. champ **Sean Pehndragon** pinned **Marty Trotter** ... **Johnny** & **Joey Grunge** defeated **Jason Ray** & **Gryphon** in a death match.
(03-20-04)

—Bobby Ference

TENNESSEE

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: ***Semifinal matches in the tournament for the vacant NWA tag team title:*** **Christopher Daniels** & **Low-Ki** defeated **Andy Douglas** & **Chase Stevens** ... **Kid Kash** & **Dallas** beat **Sinn** & **Slash** ... **Sabu** wrestled to a no-contest with **Monte Brown** ... **D-Lo Brown** & **Apolo** beat **Glenn Gilberti** & **David Young**, **Simon Diamond** & **Sonny Siaki**, and **Shane Douglas** & **Michael Shane** in a four-way elimination match ... **Frankie Kazarian** pinned **Red** to win the vacant NWA-TNA X title ... **Raven** defeated **Ron Killings**, **Abyss**, and **A.J. Styles** in a four-way match.
(03-31-04)

—Liz Hunter

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: ***Quarterfinal matches in the tournament for the vacant NWA tag team title:*** **Christopher Daniels** & **Low-Ki** defeated **Shane Douglas** & **Michael Shane** ... **Sinn** & **Slash** beat **Glenn Gilberti** & **David Young** ... **Kid Kash** & **Dallas** beat **Simon Diamond** & **Sonny Siaki** ... **Andy Douglas** & **Chase Stevens** defeated **B.G. James** & **Konnan** ... ***Non-tournament matches:*** **Ron Killings** wrestled to a no-contest with **Abyss** ... **Red** won a six-way match to earn a shot at the NWA-TNA X title, defeating **Frankie Kazarian**, **Jerry Lynn**, **Nosawa**, **Elix Skipper**, and **Petey Williams.**
(03-24-04)

—Frank Miller

NASHVILLE—NWA-TNA pay-per-view at the Fairgrounds Coliseum: **Frankie Kazarian** pinned **Elix Skipper** ... **Monte Brown** pinned **Chris Vaughn** ... **James Storm** pinned **Shane Douglas** ... **Ron Killings** won a 10-man Royal Rumble-style battle royal, last eliminating **Michael Shane** ... **Abyss** defeated **A.J. Styles** in a ladder match ... NWA heavyweight champion **Jeff Jarrett** pinned **Chris Harris.**
(03-17-04)

—Harry Burkett

BOLIVAR—Down South Championship Wrestling at the Old Wal-Mart Building: **Jamie Jay** defeated **Showtime** by disqualification ... **Family of Pain** beat **Hall** & **Indian** ... **Austin Lane** pinned **Jeremy Blaze** ... **O.D.B.** beat **Christie Ricci** and **Tracy Brooks** to win the ladies title ... Heavyweight champion **Danny B. Good** pinned **Neil Taylor** ... **Showtime** pinned **Jaimie Jay** ... **Lord Humongous** pinned **Jimmy Hall** ... **Family of Pain** pinned **The Untouchables** ... Ladies champ **O.D.B.** pinned **Christie Ricci** ... **Danny B. Good** defeated **Loose Cannon** in a title vs. hair match.
(03-27-04)

—Bryan Underwood

LAFAYETTE—Southern Wrestling Association at the National Guard Armory: **Tiny** beat **Bam Bam**... **Ray Spears** & **Blade** defeated **Gangster** & **Young Desperado** ... **Number One Stunner** beat **Kid Scorpion**... **Blade** defeated **Jailbird** ... **Matt Korbaine** & **Kevin Dunn** beat **Loose Cannon** & **Wayne** ... Heavyweight champion **Tim Scruggs** beat United States champion **American Psycho** in a ladder match.
(03-19-04)

—Tony Burdine

MILLINGTON—Just Plain Wrestling at the Lighthouse Fellowship Church: **Psycho** defeated **Force** and **Abdul Mbouto** in a three-way match ... **Bubba Pain** & **Deadly Dale** beat **Blaylok** & **Reno Diamond** ... **Golden Boy** beat **Seth Knight** ... **Dustin Starr** defeated **Alan Steele** ... **Austin Lane** pinned **Pokerface** ... **Family of Pain** defeated **The Untouchables** to win the tag team title ... **Danny B. Good** beat **Carnage Antwan** to win the heavyweight championship.
(03-19-04)

—Bryan Underwood

EAST RIDGE—Ultimate Extreme Wrestling at the UEW Arena: **Jason Hampton** defeated **Blackout** ... **The M.O.B.** beat **Mike Taylor** & **Vladimir Smirnoff** ... **Jayson Phoenix** beat **Blackie Lawless** ... **The Hollywood Playboys** beat **Youth Gone Wild** ... **Ben Thrasher** & **Rush** defeated **Skky Addams** & **Rawhead Rex** ... **Corey Cox** beat **Andrew Alexander.**
(03-13-04)

—Austin Arden

TEXAS

TYLER—New Age Wrestling Alliance at the Jason Jones Coliseum: **Rob Fantoni** beat **Randy Hanson** ... **Adam Arson** beat **Hallowmass Joseph** ... **Khan** beat **John Meyers** ... **Andy Dalton** & **Sean Cordova** beat **Cope** & **Hagen** to win the tag title ... **Joey Titan** beat **Seth Shai** by disqualification ... **Joey Titan**, **Andy Dalton**, & **Sean Cordova** beat **Hallowmass** & **Seth Shai.**
(03-28-04)

—Gary Kennedy

ARLINGTON—Professional Championship Wrestling at the PCW Arena: **Infinite 8** beat **Mr. B** ... **Dade Venge** beat **Showtime Summers** ... **John Allen** & **Mike Thunder** beat **Tim Storm** ... **Mike Foxx** beat **Jared Steele** ... **Eddie Atlas** beat **Shadow.**
(03-27-04)

—Rob Moore

ROCKWALL—Texas Christian Wrestling Federation at the CWF Arena: A three-way match between **Angel**, **Jeramy Jett**, and **Wes Word** ended in a no-contest ... **Mace** defeated **Manny Domingo** ... Light heavyweight champion **Brett Barnes** defeated **Devastator** and **Larry Green** in a three-way match ... **Slam Shady** pinned Texas heavyweight champion **Jeremy Young** to win the title.
(03-27-04)

—Travis McKeon

DENTON—Xtreme Championship Wrestling at the XCW Arena: **Gemini** pinned **Craig Jericho** ... **Al Jackson** defeated **Jack Drastic** ... **Deacon Riot** beat **Scott Phoenix** in a hardcore streetfight to win the ironman championship ... Tag team champs **Kit Carson** & **Khris Germany** beat **Mike Thunder** & **Brett Barnes** ... Heavyweight champion **Gabe Roach** beat **John Allen.**
(03-26-04)

—Harold Wurster

DALLAS—Mexican/American Wrestling Promotions at the MAWP Arena: **Sombra X** pinned **Scorpio II** ... **Black Norris** & **Black Bird** beat **El Pulpo** & **Dave the Rave** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **MACE** & **Tenru** defeated **Larry Green**, & **Bryan Justice** in a best-of-three-falls match ... **Bucanero de la Muerte, Angel Latino**, & **Inhumano** defeated **Dragon Oriental, Aguila Negra**, & **Tigre Potosino** in a best-of-three-falls match.
(03-07-04)

—Travis McKeon

VIRGINIA

DANVILLE—NWA Power Pro Wrestling at the Eagles Lodge: **Justin Flash** defeated **Marty Reed** ... **Damien Wayne** defeated **Jason Blade** ... **UNOD** defeated **The SouthSide Playas** ... **Beef** defeated **Chris Escobar** ... **Cal Callous** & **Billy Gibbs** defeated **Scotty Blaze** & **Jimi Love** ... **Cannabus** defeated **Frank Parker** by disqualification.
(03-27-04)

—Tara Rheaume

PRINCE GEORGE COUNTY—NWA Virginia at the High School: **Prince Malik** beat **Jon Jon Phenom** ... **Scotty Blaze** pinned **Mike Thomas** ... **Mike Lynn, Donavan Torrez**, & **Sean Callaway** beat **Pete Jennings, Graille**, & **Quickstyle** ... **El Toro Rojo** pinned **Chris Dramin** ... PGHS wrestling coach **Dave Emory** & **Jay** & **Trey Owens** beat **Neil Sharkey, Malicious Murphy**, & **Dragan Frost** ... GWA women's champion **Kiley McLean** wrestled NWA Virginia women's champion **Kameo** to a no-contest ... **Chris Escobar** defeated junior heavyweight champion **Chino Martinez** to win the title ... Tag champs **Mike Booth** & **Damian Wayne** beat **Sean Lei, Dirty Money**, & **Devin Sturgis** ... **Phil Brown** defeated **Brandon Day** ... **The Barbarian** defeated heavyweight champion **Preston Quinn** to win the title. After the match, Quinn announced his retirement ... **Chris Harris** beat **Glenn Gilberti**.
(03-13-04)

—Richard O'Brien

INTERNATIONAL

CANADA

HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA—MainStream Wrestling's "Slam Central Sunday" at Reflections Cabaret: Atlantic Canadian champion **Paco Loco** beat **Derrick Trahma** ... **Tony Armstrong** beat **Don Juan Sanchez** ... **Kyle Kruze** defeated **C.N. Power** by submission ... Heavyweight champion **Lincoln Steen** defeated **Quinson Valentino, Paco Loco**, and **Tony Armstrong** in a four-way elimination match.
(03-28-04)

—Malcolm Brown

DARTMOUTH, NOVA SCOTIA—MainStream Wrestling at Dave Doolittle's Sports Bar & Grill: **Firefly** beat Atlantic Canadian champion **Paco Loco** by countout ... **Tony Armstrong** beat **Outcast** ... **Kyle Kruze** & **Derrick Trahma** beat **C.N. Power** in a handicap match ... **Johnny Soul** beat **Don Juan Sanchez** ... Heavyweight champion **Lincoln Steen** beat **Quinson Valentino**.
(03-25-04)

—Malcolm Brown

Triple-H did not make the most of his one match as a member of the Smackdown roster. He and Smackdown champ Eddie Guerrero both had chances to win, but eventually the entire locker room got involved.

NIAGARA FALLS, ONTARIO—Neo Spirit Pro Wrestling at the Polish Hall: **Notorious T.I.D.** pinned **Jake O'Reilly** ... **Primo Scordino** & **Tony Carbonie** defeated **Joey Knight** & **Kevin Grace, Shawn Spears** & **Hippy**, and **Marco Malaquias** & **Crazy Steve** in a four-way elimination match ... **Alere Little Feather** beat **Phoenix** ... **The Hacker** pinned **T.J. Harley** ... **"Showtime" Eric Young** pinned **Kris Chambers** ... **Jace Fury** pinned **Derek Wylde** ... Independent champion **Cody Steele** beat **Tyson Dux** by submission ... **Lazzerus** defeated **J.T. Playa** to win the grand championship.
(03-13-04)

—Dan Murphy

WINDSOR, ONTARIO—OCW at Dillon's Nightclub: **Danger Boy** defeated **Draven Stryder** and **Knuckles Luciano** in a three-way dance ... **Chuck Weiden** pinned **Eric Stone** ... **Team Tap-Out** beat **The Spyderman** & **Shawn Hunter** by submission ... **Chuck Wagon** beat **A.J. St. Michaels** ... Light heavyweight champion **Kid Static** pinned **Youngson** ... **Jake Leduc** beat provincial heavyweight champion **Justin Copeland** to win the title ... **The Suicycos** & **Matrox** defeated tag team champs **The Heretics** & **Chris Pillon**.
(03-07-04)

—Neil McAuley

ENGLAND

SHEFFIELD—WWE at the Hallam FM Arena: **Billy Kidman** pinned **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **The Basham Brothers** ... **Rhyno** pinned **Orlando Jordan** ... **Nidia** pinned **Jamie Noble** (who was blindfolded for the match) ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** defeated **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Nunzio** in a three-way elimination match ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Bradshaw** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... **Torrie Wilson** defeated **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-19-04)

—John Redford

NEWCASTLE—WWE at the Metro Radio Arena: **Billy Kidman** defeated **Rhyno** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... **Chuck Palumbo** beat **Orlando Jordan** ... **Nidia** pinned **Jamie Noble** (who was blindfolded for the match) ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Nunzio** in a three-way elimination match ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Bradshaw** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** beat **The Basham Brothers** ... **Torrie Wilson** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-18-04)

—John Redford

SCOTLAND

GLASGOW—WWE at the Glasgow Braehead Arena: **Orlando Jordan** pinned **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** beat **Billy Gunn** & **Hardcore Holly** ... **Billy Kidman** defeated **Bradshaw** ... **Jamie Noble** (who was blindfolded for the match) pinned **Nidia** ... **Dave "Fit" Finlay** beat **Jamie Noble** in an impromptu challenge match ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Rhyno** ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Nunzio** in a three-way elimination match ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** beat **The Basham Brothers** ... **Torrie Wilson** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-21-04)

—Peter Faldon

ABERDEEN—WWE at the Aberdeen Press and Journal Arena: **Billy Kidman** pinned **Chuck Palumbo** ... **Billy Gunn** & **Hardcore Holly** defeated **The Basham Brothers** ... **Nidia** pinned **Jamie Noble** (who was blindfolded for the match) ... **Rhyno** pinned **Orlando Jordan** ... Cruiserweight champion **Chavo Guerrero Jr.** beat **Rey Misterio Jr.** and **Nunzio** in a three-way elimination match ... U.S. champion **John Cena** pinned **Bradshaw** ... Smackdown tag team champions **Rikishi** & **Scotty Too Hotty** defeated **Shelton Benjamin** & **Charlie Haas** ... **Torrie Wilson** pinned **Dawn Marie** ... Smackdown champion **Eddie Guerrero** pinned **The Big Show**.
(03-20-04)

—Sandy Travers

PWI classic

From the February 1983 issue of *Inside Wrestling*

Andre Squashes Another Victim

WHY DID THE GRAND WIZARD SACRIFICE "COWBOY" BOB ORTON?

What makes one man happily send another man to his doom? The Grand Wizard knows. "Cowboy" Bob Orton is the latest man to suffer from his horrible and potentially deadly power

By Craig Peters

AS HE LAY on the dressing room table, "Cowboy" Bob Orton wasn't a pretty sight. He'd just finished a devastatingly brutal match against Andre the Giant. His body lay limp and his

Orton's strategy against Andre the Giant—attack him early, with an aggressive, all-out assault—worked, but only in the early going. Andre just needed to establish a rhythm.

eyes ceased trying to focus. A doctor examined him carefully, shaking his head as he went about his work.

"I can treat his injuries," the doctor muttered, "but I can't treat his stupidities. This man trusted his manager when he must have known better. The Grand Wizard may be a great manager, but he's a miserable human being."

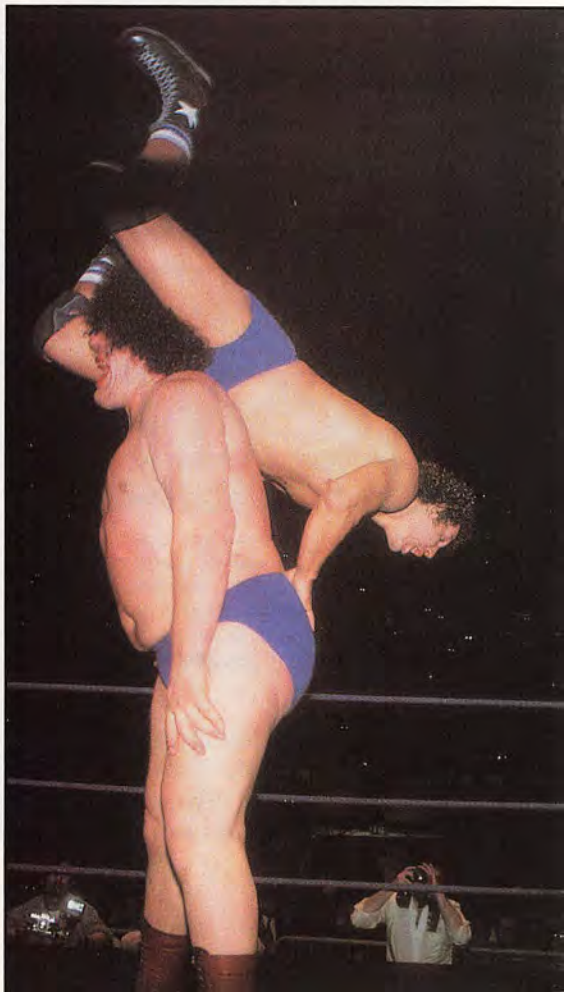
Orton was in too much agony to hear, but Wizard wouldn't have cared if Orton had been taking notes. Wizard had gotten what he wanted from Orton. The man's agonies were of no concern to the manager now. Wizard had other wrestlers and other wars.

It had been the kind of setup for which Wizard is infamous. Several months ago, he made a contractual agreement to supply a wrestler for a match against Andre the Giant. In return, he got some quick money, enabling him to engineer Superstar Billy Graham's return to the WWF.

After analyzing the strengths and weaknesses of the wrestlers available to him, Wizard chose Orton for this thankless job. A man who starts fast, Orton would batter Andre in the early going. Later, when Andre got his rhythm, Orton would be vulnerable. Andre would pay a price for his victory, but Orton would pay much more. Wizard felt he could live with that trade.

Just to make sure, Wizard engineered a strategy that was guaranteed to do his dirty work. Orton's maneuvers were sure to give Andre trouble in the beginning, perhaps do him minor injury. However, there was great risk. This was a reckless strategy, and anything less than perfection would spell Orton's doom. Wizard didn't concern himself about the risk.

It went just like Wizard planned. For the first few minutes, Orton was glorious. He had Andre down and hurt. The gargantuan grappler was stunned. He desperately went on



A backdrop from 88 inches will take the momentum away from any man. Though The Grand Wizard's strategy failed, Orton refused to point fingers.

Inside Wrestling ratings

February 1983

WWF

World champion: Bob Backlund

1. Superstar Graham
2. Ray Stevens
3. Jimmy Snuka
4. Pedro Morales
5. Bob Orton Jr.
6. Ivan Putski
7. Buddy Rose
8. Rocky Johnson
9. Big John Studd
10. Magnificent Muraco

NWA

World champion: Ric Flair

1. Wahoo McDaniel
2. Masked Superstar
3. Paul Jones
4. Harley Race
5. Jim Garvin
6. Kevin Sullivan
7. Dusty Rhodes
8. Tommy Rich
9. Bruiser
10. Roddy Piper

AWA

World champion: Nick Bockwinkel

1. Otto Wanz
2. Hulk Hogan
3. Ken Patera
4. Rick Martel
5. Mad Dog Vachon
6. Baron Von Raschke
7. Bobby Duncum
8. Crusher Blackwell
9. Greg Gagne
10. Ted DiBiase

TAG TEAMS

1. Mr. Fuji & Mr. Saito
2. Sgt. Slaughter & Pvt. Kernodle
3. Greg Gagne & Jim Brunzell
4. The Samoans
5. Sweet Brown Sugar & Butch Reed
6. Jay & Jules Strongbow
7. Gino Hernandez & Tully Blanchard
8. Rick Steamboat & Jay Youngblood
9. Ken Patera & Bobby Duncum
10. Rick Morton & Ken Lucas

Once Andre grabbed the upper hand (above right), he wasn't about to relinquish it. And the match ended like most of Andre's matches in the early-1980s did—with his opponent down for the count (below right) and in considerable pain.

the defensive, trying to stop the Orton whirlwind. Even Wizard was impressed. For a time, it looked like Orton would hand

Andre his first defeat. Then Orton made a small but fatal mistake.

From then on, it was all over but the agony. You don't give Andre an opening. The expert athlete went for the kill. He didn't intend to knock Orton senseless, but the proud "Cowboy" wouldn't surrender. Near the end, even Andre was begging the referee to stop the carnage. Orton refused to admit defeat until his body would no longer function.

After the match, Orton was helped to his dressing room by paramedics. Wizard was nowhere to be seen. By the time the doctor's examination was over, Wizard had left the building. He never even bothered to find out what had happened to his wrestler. Orton was taken back to his motel by a couple of friends. When one of them mentioned Wizard was a rat, Orton retorted, "Don't blame him. Andre beat me."

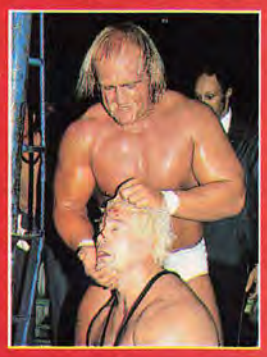
That's Wizard's greatest gift. He can engineer a wrestler's downfall and the man never accepts that Wizard is to blame. He brainwashes his wrestlers, making them believe he is after their best interests. Even as Orton lay exhausted on his bed, battered and aching, lucky to be able to continue his career, he talked on the telephone with Wizard, asking his mentor what went wrong. Wizard generously told him that perhaps the strategy was too reckless for any man to apply precisely. Orton said he agreed.

Wizard once again has it his own way. It will be months before Orton is fully recovered. Andre has had his match against a Wizard-trained opponent. The wrestlers Wizard wanted intact and his future plans remained so. And Superstar Billy Graham is back in the WWF and the number-one-ranked contender.

As the doctor said, "Wizard may be a great manager, but he's a miserable human being." □

Inside Wrestling, February 1983

The cover: A "bloody horror" was how we described a barbed-wire fence match between Dusty Rhodes and Terry Funk, and a horribly bloody photo of the two warriors was right there on the cover, too. Such a gruesome spectacle became necessary after Funk turned against "The American Dream" in a barbed-wire fence tag team bout weeks earlier. The accompanying story described the match—which ended in a draw—in vividly gruesome detail and wondered that if such a bout still couldn't settle the score between the two, what could?



Strength vs. Strength: A big debate going on two decades plus a year ago was over which man was stronger, Hulk Hogan or Ken Patera. The tale of the tape revealed that Hogan was the bigger man in each category, but then Patera was a bronze medalist in the 1972 Olympic weightlifting competition. The editors and writers of *Inside Wrestling* were split evenly on the issue, with two arguing for Patera, two backing the "Hulkster," and three believing it was simply too close to call.

Before He Got Millions: Ted DiBiase said he didn't "give a damn" how the fans felt about him when he was put on the "Hotseat" by *Inside Wrestling*. A lot of people were shocked by his betrayal of his friend Junkyard Dog and heel turn, but he told us it was JYD who betrayed him when he agreed to sub for DiBiase in a North American title match and won the championship. DiBiase proceeded to beat JYD for the gold. DiBiase got much more nasty and arrogant as "The Million-Dollar Man" in the WWF a few years later.

Beautiful Brawl: Pro-heel columnist Dan Shocket admitted he wasn't impressed by the NWA World title reign of Ric Flair when he was assigned to cover a Flair defense against Texas tough guy and fellow heel Stan Hansen. But he quickly and happily changed his mind after witnessing their ferocious brawl in Atlanta. It ended in a double-countout, but Shocket still labeled it one of the greatest championship matches he had ever seen. And he wrote that the "Nature Boy" had "the potential to be one of the immortals."

Spat Over Snuka: Both Buddy Rogers and Capt. Lou Albano were eager to engage in a little telephone warfare for our "One On One" feature, and their conversation got very heated. Rogers claimed to have proof that Albano was mismanaging Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka's WWF career and cheating him out of thousands of dollars. Albano simply called Rogers a liar. At the time, Rogers was unsure of whether he wanted to manage Snuka himself, but he ultimately took the job, and it turned into a fruitful partnership.

BACK ISSUES OF the Wrestler

Don't miss a single issue of the magazine that has thrilled wrestling fans for two generations, THE WRESTLER! Complete your collection of the most respected wrestling publication in the world! Supplies are limited, so don't delay—order today!

May 1979: Paul Jones-Rick Steamboat Feud: Who Is Really To Blame? Also: Valiants, Jack Brisco, Larry Hennig, Johnson-King, Lanza-Mulligan, Chief Jay Strongbow, Snuka-Patera.

April 1980: Did Ken Patera Destroy Dusty Rhodes' Bionic Elbow? Also: Terry Funk, Kevin Von Erich, DiBiase-Backlund, Bockwinkel & Heenan, Baba-Race, Mr. Wrestling II, Youngblood & Steamboat.

Aug. 1980: The Reign Of Bloodshed Begins: Stevens & Valentine Win The NWA Tag Team Title! Also: Kerry Von Erich, Backlund & Skaaland, Nick Bockwinkel, Zbyszko-Bruno, Keirn-Muraco, Samoans, Wrestling II-Idol.

June 1981: Bruno Sammartino: "I Want To Break Stan Hansen's Neck!" Also: Ted DiBiase, Garea & Martel, Mike Graham, Mongolian Stomper, Piper-Superstar, Verne Gagne, Tommy Rich.

Sept. 1980: Why Ernie Ladd Says ... "I'm Tired Of Being Your King." Also: Rick Steamboat, Mad Dog Vachon, Bugsy McGraw, Patera-Patterson, Manny Fernandez, Bob Backlund, Greg Gagne, Mike Sharpe.

Feb. 1981: Larry Zbyszko's Claim: "Tony Garea Begged Me Not To Hurt Him!" Also: The Grappler, Race-Patera, Hussein Arab, Humperdink-Rhodes, Gilberts, Mr. Wrestling II, Bravo-Bockwinkel.

Oct. 1981: Is The Funk Family At War? Why Terry Funk And Dory Funk Jr. Were Forced To Wrestle. Also: Backlund-Patterson-Mosca, Harley Race, Rhodes-Khan, Kevin Sullivan, Flair-Patera, Verne Gagne.

Aug. 1982: Nick Bockwinkel: "Tommy Rich Is Too Stupid To Be Champion!" Also: Putski-Adonis, Blackjack Mulligan Jr., Roddy Piper, Rick Steamboat, Lawler-Kaufman, Mike Graham.

April 1982: How Jack Brisco Controls Ric Flair's Championship Destiny. Also: Tito Santana, Valentine-Atlas, Bob Roop, Armstrongs, John Studd, Eric Embry.

May 1982: Bob Backlund's Fourth Anniversary As WWF Champion: The All-American Boy Grows Up. Also: Koloff-Rich, Superstar Graham, David Von Erich, Putski-Morales, Dusty Rhodes.

June 1982: Ric Flair vs. Rick Steamboat: How The NWA Belt Strangled Wrestling's Greatest Friendship. Also: Piper-Armstrong, Hussein Arab, Bruno Sammartino, Adonis & Ventura, Butch Reed.

July 1982: Harley Race—His Destiny Is In The Hands Of Tommy Rich. Also: Rick Steamboat, Chief Jay Strongbow, Buzz Sawyer, Ric Flair, Roddy Piper.

Sept. 1982: Dusty Rhodes Returns To Florida: The Tragic Comeback That Should Not Have Happened. Also: Manny Fernandez, Armstrong-Piper, Blassie-Mulligan, Japan, Bockwinkel-Hogan.

Nov. 1982: Clash Of The Titans—Backlund vs. Flair: Who's Better? Also: Roddy Piper, Gagne & Brunzell, Putski & Snuka, Brian Blair.

Dec. 1982: Morales vs. Snuka: Does Pedro Deserve To Be Intercontinental Champion? Also: Bob Orton Jr., Kamala, Rich & Rhodes, Barry Windham, Ted DiBiase, JYD-Bockwinkel, Oliver Humperdink.

Jan. 1983: Ivan Putski Humiliates Cowboy Bob Orton: Can The Grand Wizard Pick Up The Pieces? Also: Barry Windham, Muraco-Sawyer-Rich, Nick Bockwinkel, Flair-Youngblood-Steamboat, Fabulous Kangaroos.

Feb. 1983: Exclusive Coverage: Nick Bockwinkel Regains The AWA Title From Otto Wanz. Also: Backlund-Graham, Rich-Sawyer, Barry Windham, Martel & Garea, McDaniel & Piper, Kamala.

May 1983: What Will Happen When The Samoans Become Too Smart For Capt. Lou Albano? Also: Tommy Rich, Terry Allen, Eddie Gilbert, Kerry-Race, Ladd & Rhodes, Flair-Orndorff.

June 1983: Flair-Windham Match Spurs Controversy: Should The NWA Champion Be Allowed To Choose His Challengers? Also: Ivan Koloff, Bruiser Brody, Kerry Von Erich, Andre-Kamala, Brazil-Valentine, Gagnes-Martel.

July 1983: Ric Flair: "I Wrestle The Men Backlund Is Afraid Of." Also: Putski-Adonis, Kevin Sullivan, Bob Roop, Martel-Heenan.

Sept. 1983: Nick Bockwinkel Forces Hulk Hogan Into Exile: And Only The Fans Can Bring Him Back. Also: Briscos, Blackwell-Kerry-Race, Paul Ellering, Mulligan & Windham.

Nov. 1983: Target—Harley Race! Can Dusty Rhodes Fulfill His American Dream A Third Time? Also: Rick Rude, Rotundo-Kabuki, Gagne & Brunzell, Tito Santana, Von Erichs-Freebirds.

Dec. 1983: The Night The AWA World Title Was Stolen From Mil Mascaras. Also: Roddy Piper, Larry Zbyszko, Dino Bravo, Fabulous Ones, Garvin & Sunshine.

March 1984: Is Tito Santana Trying To Blackmail The WWF? Also: Wayne & Sawyer, Hogan-Race, David Von Erich, Jesse Ventura.

July 1984: Tommy Rich Is Back! And He Owes It All To The Fans. Also: Valiant-Rhodes, Ric Flair, Mike Von Erich, Billy Jack.

Aug. 1984: Garvin vs. Roberts: "Hands Of Stone" Crushes "The Snake." Also: Freebirds-Devastation Inc., Sawyer-Sullivan, Lawler & Dillon, McDaniel-Race.

Nov. 1984: The $50,000 Full-Nelson Challenge Match: Billy Jack Gets Bloody Revenge Against Superstar Graham. Also: Roddy Piper, Heenan & Saito, Brody & Hansen, Kerry Von Erich.

Dec. 1984: The Tully Blanchard-Rick Steamboat Feud: Will Dusty Rhodes End It ... Or Make It Worse? Also: Tito Santana, Martel-Atlas, D. Funk, Mike Von Erich, Williams-Taylor.

Jan. 1985: Kerry Von Erich: "I've Got Ric Flair's NWA Title Within My Grasp." Also: Albano & Lauper, Koloffs & Kernodle, Road Warriors, Lawler & Rude, Scott McGhee.

Feb. 1985: Greg Valentine Wins Tito Santana's Intercontinental Title ... But Does He Deserve To Be Champion? Also: Ronnie Garvin, Warriors-Sheepherders, Flair-Billy Jack, Nikita Koloff.

April 1985: Six-Man Riot! Road Warriors & Ellering vs. Rhodes, Rich, & Anderson. Also: Tonga Kid, tomorrow's stars, Adams-Kevin, Flair-Jack, Terminators.

May 1985: The Road Warriors vs. Dusty Rhodes & Manny Fernandez: Exclusive Coverage Of The Historic Tag Team Superbowl! Also: Al-Kaissie-Gagne, Backlund-Race, Haynes-Kamala, Tito Santana.

June 1985: Are The WWF Rulebreakers Singling Out Barry Windham For Destruction? Also: Zbyszko-Backlund, Rhodes-Blanchard, Tommy Rich, Oliver-Haynes.

July 1985: It's A Dog's Life ... And Junkyard Dog Wouldn't Trade It With Anyone! Also: Backlund-Martel, Kernodle-Koloff, Butch Reed, Hernandez & Sunshine, Mike Graham.

Aug. 1985: Ten Days Of Blood And Glory: The Road Warriors Invade Japan! Also: Terry Taylor, Magnum T.A., Bugsy McGraw, Sheik & Volkoff-Windham & Rotundo, 20th anniversary.

Oct. 1985: David Shultz Gets An NWA Title Shot: Ric Flair—"I Wrestle The Men Hulk Hogan Is Afraid Of!" Also: Misty Blue, Rick Martel, Kendall Windham, George Steele, Killer Brooks, all-time top 10.

May 1986: Von Erich Family Feud: Is Lance Coming Between Kevin And Kerry? Also: Hansen-Hall, Hillbillies-Beefcake & Valentine, Butch Reed, Santana-Ventura.

June 1986: Kerry Reveals His Secret: "I've Told Magnum T.A. How To Beat Ric Flair!" Also: Steve Williams, Hogan-Orton, Flair-Bockwinkel, Lex Luger.

Nov. 1986: Morton & Gibson Take A Trip To Badstreet U.S.A.: The Rock 'n' Roll Express vs. The Freebirds. Also: Eddie Gilbert, Hogan-Orndorff, Mike Von Erich, Mulligan-Bass.

Dec. 1986: Ric Flair's NWA Title Reign: Last Chance To Silence The Critics! Also: Nikita Koloff, Gilbert & Sting, Hogan-Piper, Abdullah-Adams, Nick Bockwinkel.

Jan. 1987: Bobby Heenan's Bitter Crusade To Destroy Hulk Hogan. Also: Borne & Sawyer, Garvins, Ted DiBiase, Misty Blue Simmes.

Feb. 1987: Tragedy Strikes Wrestling: Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever. Also: Roberts-Steamboat, Crusher Yurkof, Terry Gordy, Wendell Cooley.

March 1987: Ivan & Khrushchev's Kremlin Orders: Crush Nikita Koloff's Russian Revolution! Also: Barry Windham, One Man Gang, Brian Adias, Savage-Steamboat, Jimmy Snuka.

June 1987: The Hart Foundation vs. The Can-Ams: Special Analysis Of This WWF Superfeud! Also: Nick Bockwinkel, Paul Orndorff, Rhodes & Murdoch, Steve Williams.

July 1987: Missy Hyatt: Will She Kiss And Tell In The WWF? Also: Chris Adams, Hart Foundation, Luger & Horsemen, Nikita-Cornette, Stan Hansen.

Sept. 1987: Independence Day! Also: Hennig-Bockwinkel, Hart Foundation, Koloffs, Bubba Rogers, Missy Hyatt.

Oct. 1987: The Honky Tonk Man Wins The Intercontinental Title: Is Randy Savage The Fans' Last Hope. Also: Kerry Von Erich, Ken Patera, Sting-Gilbert, Horsemen-Freebirds, Zbyszko-Gagne.

Dec. 1987: Hulk Hogan: Will He Be Drowned By The New Wave Of Challengers? Also: Hennig-Lawler, Windham-Steiner, Flair-Williams, Brutus Beefcake, Ronnie Garvin.

Jan. 1988: The Experts Agree: The Road Warriors Will Turn Bad In 1988! Also: Koloff-Taylor, Curt Hennig, Duggan-DiBiase.

Feb. 1988: Ric Flair Admits: "I'm Nothing Without The NWA Belt!" Also: Kerry Von Erich, Jim Cornette, Hogan-Andre, Hennig-Lawler, Terry Taylor.

March 1988: After Four Years As Champion ... Only Hulk Hogan Can Beat Hulk Hogan. Also: Warriors-Demolition, Steve Williams, Luger & Dillon, Calgary, Terry Gordy.

May 1988: Belt Or No Belt ... Hulk Hogan Is Still The People's Champion! Also: Owen Hart, Tatum & Victory, Scott Hall, Madusa Miceli, Luger-Arn.

June 1988: How Sting's War With Ric Flair Could Make Him A Horseman! Also: Bobby Heenan, Martel-Zenk, Kerry-Gordy, Ted DiBiase, Nikita Koloff.

Aug. 1988: World Tag Title Power Shift! Also: Windham & Luger, Demolition, Taylor-Freebirds, Paul Ellering, Owen & Bret.

Oct. 1988: The Fantastics Declare: "We Will Not Share Our Fans With The Rock 'n' Roll Express!" Also: Rhodes-Windham, Curt Hennig, Roberts-Rude, Rougeaus, Jim Garvin.

Jan. 1989: The Horsemen Destroyed! The World Title Gained! But The Midnight Express Must Still Prove Themselves! Also: Top Guns, Hart & Rougeaus, Andre-Savage-Hulk, Terry Gordy, Kevin Von Erich.

March 1989: Scared Stiff! "Don't Say Snake!" Also: Jeff Jarrett, Cactus Jack, Ric Flair, Bam Bam Bigelow, Hercules, Iron Sheik.

April 1989: Hulkamania Runs Wild Again! Can Randy Savage Stop The Onslaught? Also: British Bulldogs, Road Warriors-Sting & Luger, Lawler-Kerry, Andre, Mike Rotundo.

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April 1991: Hulk Hogan: The Challenges That Remain. Also: Ted DiBiase, Skyscrapers, Lex Luger, Tom Zenk, Fabulous Ones.

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Jan. 1993: Sting Turns Sadistic: "Hurting Jake Makes Me Happy!" Also: Anderson & Eaton, Bushwhackers-Moondogs, Ramon-Savage, Natural Disasters, Masa Chono.

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Nov. 1993: Bret Hart vs. Lex Luger: It's Not Over Yet! Also: Rude-Dustin, Hulk Hogan, Marty Jannetty, Heavenly Bodies, Tatanka, Sherri Martel.

Jan. 1994: Roasted, Broiled, Fried, Baked ... Any Way You Cook It, Hogan's A Chicken! Also: Rude-Flair, Bagwell & Scorpio, Jim Cornette, Jerry Lawler, Hansen & T. Funk-Abdullah & Sullivan.

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☐ APR 82	☐ AUG 85	☐ JUL 89	☐ JUN 92	☐ MAY 96	☐ MAR 99	☐ NOV 01
☐ MAY 82	☐ OCT 85	☐ AUG 89	☐ JUL 92	☐ JUN 96	☐ APR 99	☐ JAN 02
☐ JUN 82	☐ MAY 86	☐ SEP 89	☐ AUG 92	☐ AUG 96	☐ MAY 99	☐ MAR 02
☐ JUL 82	☐ JUN 86	☐ OCT 89	☐ SEP 92	☐ SEP 96	☐ JUN 99	☐ MAY 02
☐ AUG 82	☐ JUL 86	☐ NOV 89	☐ OCT 92	☐ OCT 96	☐ JUL 99	☐ JUL 02
☐ SEP 82	☐ NOV 86	☐ JAN 90	☐ NOV 92	☐ NOV 96	☐ AUG 99	☐ SEP 02
☐ NOV 82	☐ DEC 86	☐ MAR 90	☐ DEC 92	☐ DEC 96	☐ SEP 99	☐ NOV 02
☐ DEC 82	☐ JAN 87	☐ APR 90	☐ JAN 93	☐ HOL 96	☐ OCT 99	☐ JAN 03
☐ JAN 83	☐ FEB 87	☐ JUL 90	☐ FEB 93	☐ JAN 97	☐ NOV 99	☐ MAR 03
☐ FEB 83	☐ MAR 87	☐ AUG 90	☐ MAR 93	☐ FEB 97	☐ DEC 99	☐ MAY 03
☐ MAY 83	☐ JUN 87	☐ SEP 90	☐ APR 93	☐ JUL 97	☐ HOL 99	☐ JUL 03
☐ JUN 83	☐ JUL 87	☐ OCT 90	☐ MAY 93	☐ NOV 97	☐ JAN 00	☐ SEP 03
☐ JUL 83	☐ SEP 87	☐ DEC 90	☐ NOV 93	☐ DEC 97	☐ FEB 00	☐ NOV 03
☐ SEP 83	☐ OCT 87	☐ FEB 91	☐ JAN 94	☐ HOL 97	☐ APR 00	☐ JAN 04
☐ NOV 83	☐ DEC 87	☐ MAR 91	☐ MAY 94	☐ MAR 98	☐ MAY 00	☐ MAR 04
☐ DEC 83	☐ JAN 88	☐ APR 91	☐ JUL 94	☐ APR 98	☐ JUN 00	☐ MAY 04
☐ MAR 84	☐ FEB 88	☐ MAY 91	☐ AUG 94	☐ MAY 98	☐ JUL 00	☐ JULY 04
☐ JUL 84	☐ MAR 88	☐ JUN 91	☐ SEP 94	☐ JUN 98	☐ AUG 00	
☐ AUG 84	☐ MAY 88	☐ JUL 91	☐ JAN 95	☐ JUL 98	☐ SEP 00	

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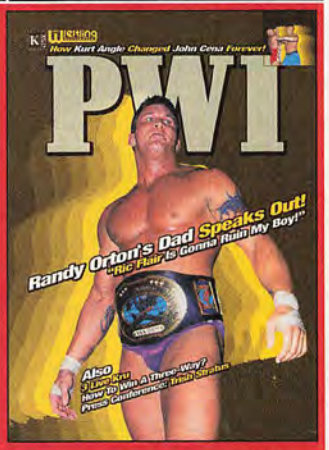
PRO WRESTLING ILLUSTRATED welcomes readers' comments on any of our stories or columns. Send letters to: BETWEEN FALLS Box 1148, Ft. Washington, PA 19034
Or you can e-mail your comments to prowrestlingillustrated@yahoo.com
Letters preceded by a ☎ indicate letters left by fans on the *PWI* Hotline (1-900-226-4PWI; see ad elsewhere in this issue).

RIPPING RIC, RANDY



In the cover story of our May 2004 issue, "Cowboy" Bob Orton wrote that he feared Ric Flair would be the downfall of his son, Randy. The elder Orton said Flair was teaching his son to cheat in matches no matter what and feels such an approach might hinder Randy's long-term development.

Perhaps for the first time in his career, the majority of readers seemed to see eye-to-eye with the man formerly known as "Ace."

"Bob Orton provided a fascinating look into the psyche of Ric Flair, and he knows what he's talking about," wrote Lawrence Dooley of Pittsburgh. "Flair always looks for the easy way out of a situation, and Randy seems to be doing more of that each week."

"I would love to see 'Cowboy' Bob come back to WWE and try to straighten out this situation," e-mailed Jim Baer of Wilmington, Delaware. "Orton was always an entertaining, straight-shooting wrestler, and WWE would be a more interesting place if he were around."

Of course, there are always the dissenters.

"Flair ruining Orton? Don't make me laugh!" wrote Melissa Salvo of Hamilton, Ontario. "Flair is only the greatest of all-time, a man who can teach Orton more than his redneck father ever could. Flair is going to make Randy a superstar."

GOOD GOLLY, MISS MOLLY!

I was absolutely horrified when WWE allowed Victoria to shave Molly Holly's head at WrestleMania XX. I know it was the stipulation of the match, but did Victoria really have to shave her down to the scalp? Kevin Nash and Jeff Jarrett both lost hair matches and came out of them with more fashionable haircuts, but Molly was shaved bald as a cueball.

I truly felt bad for Molly, but a weird thing happened when I saw her on *Raw* the next night. Is it just me, or does Molly actually look even *hotter* bald?

I can't be the only person who thinks so. Now I think I understand why people used to call Sinead O'Connor a sex symbol. Maybe I have some kind of personal issues. Should I join a self-help group?

In any case, Molly, don't be ashamed of your looks. You're still gorgeous, and I'm convinced you'll always be.

BRAD KELLY
Jackson Hole, WY

There couldn't have been anyone as happy about Benoit's Raw title win at WrestleMania as Benoit himself, his family, and Eddie Guerrero, but reader J.P. Lyons ranks up there pretty high.

"WOLVERINE'S" JUST DESSERTS

Congratulations, Chris Benoit!

The moment the WrestleMania main event was changed from a singles match between Benoit and HHH to a triple threat with Shawn Michaels, I was positive Benoit was going to get screwed out of the title. I was certain WrestleMania XX would close with Michaels prancing around with the title back around his waist.

I've never been happier to have been wrong in my life.

I've been a Benoit fan since I first saw him in ECW. I managed to snag some tapes of him competing as Pegasus Kid in Japan, and my respect for him grew even more. During his WCW run, he was consistently one of the best wrestlers, yet he never cracked the upper echelon. Although he finally won the World title in 2000, he left the company the following day. Shortly after his WWF debut, he had the title in his hands with apparent wins over The Rock at Fully Loaded and Unforgiven. Both times, Rock escaped with the belt.

I was just happy to see him win the Royal Rumble this year and get a *shot* at the title at 'Mania. But to actually see my all-time favorite hoist the Raw title above his head was my personal favorite moment in wrestling history, especially when Eddie Guerrero came out to help him celebrate.

Congratulations, Chris. You deserve that title. And congratulations, WWE, for giving "The Crippler" a chance to shine.

J.P. LYONS
Olean, NY

ANOTHER BUFF FAN?

I love your magazines, but a while back, you published a

letter from a fan asking for more Buff Bagwell in your magazines. I agree! There are still a lot of Buff fans out there, and he's still in demand all over the world. I just saw him about a month ago in Virginia, and the place popped huge for him. He signed about 200 autographs for fans at the show. You just did The Great Muta in "Through The Years," so c'mon! Don't you have enough photos of Buff to do something? How about an article on him surviving on the indy circuit?

MARK FLEMING
wrestmark2000@yahoo.com

ROH'S PREDICAMENT

I don't know how your magazines are going to address the situation involving Rob Feinstein and Ring of Honor. While you are journalistically bound to at least acknowledge the allegations against the former ROH co-owner ("Ringside," June 2004), I urge you and the fans to refrain from speculating about Feinstein's personal actions or how the situation might adversely affect ROH.

The fact of the matter is that, as of this writing, Feinstein has not been charged with a crime. Therefore, I ask you to remember the principal tenet of the United States judicial system, that a person is innocent until proven guilty.

I have been surprised, and a little saddened, that several ROH wrestlers (including Samoa Joe, Christopher Daniels, and others) spoke out on the situation before all of the information could come out. I don't know Feinstein personally, but I strongly feel a man shouldn't be tried in a public forum through secondhand accounts or open speculation.

As a long-time ROH fan, I hope this situation will be resolved speedily, and I wish the best of luck to the ROH wrestlers and ownership.

CHARLES FODOR
Robbinsdale, MN

"Get It?" was a very popular WWE slogan of a few years ago, and reader Bob O'Donnell is convinced that wrestler-turned-author Ole Anderson doesn't.

OLE JUST CAN'T GET IT

During the "Attitude" era, WWE adopted a simple slogan: "Get It?" I understood it completely. Those two words said so much to all those people who don't get what pro wrestling is all about.

Judging by Stu Saks' assessment of Ole Anderson's book ("From The Desk Of ..." May 2004), Ole is one of those people who doesn't get it. WWE recognized that many of its fans had grown up and needed wrestling to be reintroduced to fit their demographic. To do so, they let fans know upfront what wrestling was all about, instead of insulting the fans' intelligence.

That concept was lost on most, though. Pro wrestling doesn't need to trick people into watching. The crap about the exposing of the business is overblown. More of wrestling is "real" than even WWE will admit, and the line between fantasy and reality is just as blurry as ever. People who think they know everything are actually baffled, and those fans who get it for the pure entertainment value will always get it.

We deserve our *Confidential*, our *Unscripted*, and our *PWI*. They only enhance our passion. Anyone who does not get it never will, and those people will never seek out the facts and figure "it" out. I have to believe in my heart that the day everyone, fans and non-fans alike, respects pro wrestling and its stars will be the day we know that the business was never truly exposed.

Wrestling was around before Ole Anderson and is still around today—long after he was relevant—and the most lucrative periods bypassed him. Mr. McMahon didn't change the perception of wrestling or the way the world views it. However, Ole Anderson has changed the way I remember him and the way I view his career. His "inner workings" are not impressive.

BOB O'DONNELL
Iowa City, IA ☐

PWI Hotline Extra!

Your answers to our question of the week!

Question of the Week: What wrestler do you feel will benefit most from switching brands in the recent lottery? (March 23 to 29, 2004)

Hotline callers respond: "Rob Van Dam is the most obvious answer," replied Craig Cummings of Modesto, California. "RVD clearly needed a change of scenery, and with Brock Lesnar and Kurt Angle out for now, he has a great opportunity to climb the Smackdown rankings and get title shots."

"It's about time Nidia was given something to do," said Matt Flaherty of Tallahassee, Florida. "I don't know if she can beat Molly, Victoria, or Trish, but seeing her wrestle them has to be better than watching her hobble around blind on Smackdown."

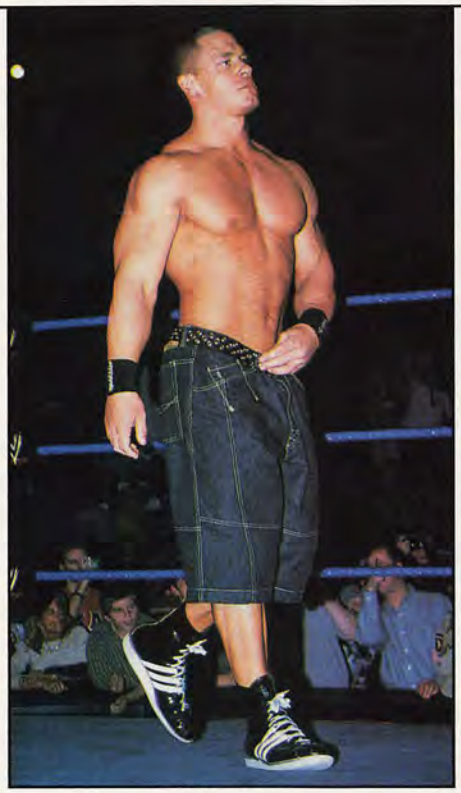
"This may seem farfetched, but I think Shelton Benjamin has what it takes to become a breakout singles star," said Jesse Dean of Boaz, Alabama. "I could see him winning the Intercontinental title very soon."

PWI official ratings

For period ended April 11, 2004

TOP 10

1. **CHRIS BENOIT**
   224, Edmonton, Alberta
   (2) WWE Raw champion
2. **EDDIE GUERRERO**
   223, El Paso, TX
   (1) WWE Smackdown champion
3. **KENTA KOBASHI**
   282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
   (3) GHC heavyweight champion
4. **TRIPLE-H**
   269, Greenwich, CT
   (4) No. 1 contender: WWE Raw title
5. **JOHN CENA**
   260, Los Angeles, CA
   (10) WWE U.S. champion
6. **TOSHIAKI KAWADA**
   245, Ashikaga, Japan
   (6) All-Japan Triple Crown champion
7. **SHAWN MICHAELS**
   217, San Antonio, TX
   (-) No. 2 contender: WWE Raw title
8. **JEFF JARRETT**
   230, Nashville, TN
   (7) NWA heavyweight champion
9. **RANDY ORTON**
   265, St. Louis, MO
   (9) WWE Intercontinental champion
10. **JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD**
    306, Roscoe, TX
    (-) No. 2 contender: WWE Smackdown title



John Cena

TAG TEAMS

1. **BATISTA & RIC FLAIR**
   Combined weight: 561 pounds
   (-) WWE Raw tag team champions
2. **MINORU SUZUKI & YOSHIHIRO TAKAYAMA**
   Combined weight: 514 pounds
   (2) IWGP International tag team champions
3. **RIKISHI & SCOTTY TOO HOTTY**
   Combined weight: 641 pounds
   (1) WWE Smackdown tag team champions
4. **BUH BUH RAY & D-VON DUDLEY**
   Combined weight: 579 pounds
   (6) No. 1 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
5. **MITSUHARU MISAWA & YOSHINARI OGAWA**
   Combined weight: 430 pounds
   (4) GHC tag team champions
6. **THE BASHAM BROTHERS**
   Combined weight: 492 pounds
   (5) No. 2 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
7. **ROB CONWAY & SYLVAN GRENIER**
   Combined weight: 475 pounds
   (-) No. 1 contenders: WWE Raw tag title
8. **KID KASH & DALLAS**
   Combined weight: 494 pounds
   (-) NWA tag team champions
9. **AKIO & SAKODA**
   Combined weight: 430 pounds
   (-) No. 3 contenders: WWE Smackdown tag title
10. **KAZ HAYASHI & SATOSHI KOJIMA**
    Combined weight: 416 pounds
    (7) All-Japan International tag team champions

WWE RAW

Raw Champion:
CHRIS BENOIT
(C) 224, Edmonton, Alberta

1—**TRIPLE-H**
(1) 269, Greenwich, CT
2—**SHAWN MICHAELS**
(3) 217, San Antonio, TX
3—**RANDY ORTON**
(2) 265, St. Louis, MO
4—**SHELTON BENJAMIN**
(-) 245, Minneapolis, MN
5—**CHRISTIAN**
(4) 225, Toronto, Ontario
6—**CHRIS JERICHO**
(5) 225, Winnipeg, Manitoba
7—**KANE**
(6) 326, St. Louis, MO
8—**TAJIRI**
(-) 213, Tokyo, Japan
9—**RHYNO**
(-) 275, Detroit, MI
10—**MATT HARDY**
(10) 220, Cameron, NC

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown Champion:
EDDIE GUERRERO
(C) 223, El Paso, TX

1—**JOHN CENA**
(2) 260, Los Angeles, CA
2—**JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD**
(-) 306, Roscoe, TX
3—**THE BIG SHOW**
(3) 485, Aiken, SC
4—**BOOKER T**
(-) 250, Houston, TX
5—**THE UNDERTAKER**
(4) 304, Dallas, TX
6—**CHAVO GUERRERO JR.**
(5) 185, El Paso, TX
7—**ROB VAN DAM**
(-) 237, Battle Creek, MI
8—**REY MISTERIO JR.**
(6) 163, San Diego, CA
9—**RENE DUPREE**
(-) 250, Montreal, Quebec
10—**CHARLIE HAAS**
(-) 265, Edmond, OK

OVW

OVW Champion:
NICK DINSMORE
(C) 226, Jefferson, IN

1—**JOHNNY JETER**
(1) 218, San Diego, CA
2—**MARK MAGNUS**
(3) 231, Syracuse, NY
3—**INSPECTOR IMPACT**
(4) 285, Phoenix, AZ
4—**NOVA**
(5) 214, Bricktown, NJ
5—**MATT CAPPOTELLI**
(7) 220, Norwich, NY
6—**STANDING THUNDER**
(6) 229, Louisville, KY
7—**BRENT ALBRIGHT**
(9) 230, Tulsa, OK
8—**AARON STEVENS**
(8) 237, Boston, MA
9—**SETH SKYFIRE**
(10) 224, Louisville, KY
10—**CHRIS CAGE**
(-) 220, Youngstown, OH

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:
SAMOA JOE
(C) 270, American Samoa

1—**A.J. STYLES**
(1) 202, Gainesville, GA
2—**MATT STRYKER**
(2) 220, Cincinnati, OH
3—**JERRY LYNN**
(3) 216, Minneapolis, MN
4—**JAY BRISCOE**
(4) 184, Laurel, DE
5—**RED**
(5) 147, Brooklyn, NY
6—**C.M. PUNK**
(6) 220, Chicago, IL
7—**DOUG WILLIAMS**
(7) 230, Maidstone, England
8—**B.J. WHITMER**
(8) 210, Owensboro, KY
9—**JOHN WALTERS**
(10) 220, Boston, MA
10—**DANNY MAFF**
(9) 245, Brooklyn, NY

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (-) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue. while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue.

CHIKARA: Champion—Hallowicked; **1**—Mike Quackenbush; **2**—Jigsaw; **3**—Gran Akuma; **4**—Icarus; **5**—Jack Marciano; **6**—Eddie Kingston; **7**—Jolly Roger; **8**—UltraMantis; **9**—Mister ZERO; **10**—Shane Storm.

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Christopher Daniels; **1**—Ace Darling; **2**—Prince Nana; **3**—Cheetah Master; **4**—Mike Kruel; **5**—John Walters; **6**—Austin Aries; **7**—Mike Fury; **8**—Mr. Ooh La La; **9**—Johnny Maxx; **10**—Japanese Pool Boy.

FAR NORTH WRESTLING: Champion—T. Rantula; **1**—Mike Quackenbush; **2**—Larry Zbyszko; **3**—Dean Jablonski; **4**—Dennis Gregory; **5**—Jimmy Vegas; **6**—Kevin Grace; **7**—Lord Zoltan; **8**—Jigsaw; **9**—Gran Akuma; **10**—Dirk Ciglar.

INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING ALLIANCE: Champion—Rahn Jordan; **1**—James Boulevard; **2**—Phillip Pain; **3**—Panhead Nelson; **4**—Don Matthews; **5**—Billy Starr; **6**—Tommy Sawyer; **7**—The Tower; **8**—Casey J; **9**—Lance Christopher; **10**—Logan Kincayde.

MID-STATES WRESTLING: Champion—Michael Barry; **1**—Jason Jones; **2**—Craig Keesman; **3**—Griz; **4**—Big Hoss; **5**—Dookie Grande; **6**—Babyface Nelson; **7**—Kevin Lovejones; **8**—Jake Boulder; **9**—Rich Allen; **10**—Thomas Thorn.

NATIONAL INDEPENDENT CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Ken Steel; **1**—Dustin Daniels; **2**—Dragan Frost; **3**—KnightStalker; **4**—Buffalo Frits; **5**—Seth; **6**—Frank Savage; **7**—Wyld Chyld; **8**—Cannabus; **9**—Shaka; **10**—Zak Kronik.

NORTHEAST WRESTLING: Champion—Title Vacant; **1**—Jerry Lawler; **2**—Dusty Rhodes; **3**—Julio Dinero; **4**—Al Snow; **5**—Xavier; **6**—Reckless Youth; **7**—Johnny Heartbreaker; **8**—Jeff Starr; **9**—Dan Maff; **10**—Slyk Wagner Brown.

NWA FLORIDA: Champion—Todd Shane; **1**—Steve Madison; **2**—Justice; **3**—Lex Lovett; **4**—Bruce Steele; **5**—Mike Sullivan; **6**—Billy Fives; **7**—Danny Doring; **8**—Frankie Capone; **9**—Midian; **10**—Maximum Capacity.

NWA WILDSIDE: Champion—Onyx; **1**—Jason Cross; **2**—Mikal Adyran; **3**—Caprice Coleman; **4**—Rainman; **5**—Todd Sexton; **6**—Gabriel; **7**—Iceberg; **8**—Altar Boy Luke; **9**—Azrael; **10**—Fast Eddie.

SUPERSTARS OF AMERICAN WRESTLING: Champion—Billy Maverick; **1**—Eric Draven; **2**—Bryan Johnson; **3**—Mason the Mangler; **4**—Chris Jester; **5**—Mike Dreamer; **6**—Bruiser Brady; **7**—The Droid; **8**—Bubba Black; **9**—Phoenix; **10**—Psycho.

TRANS-AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Joey Ventura; **1**—Kenjitsu; **2**—American Bulldawg; **3**—John Deaton; **4**—Yukon Erich Jr.; **5**—Running Wolf; **6**—Brandon Groom; **7**—Dusty Wolfe; **8**—Fuel; **9**—Anarchy; **10**—Dodder Green.

ULTIMATE CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Paulie Gilmore; **1**—Gary Gold; **2**—Apocalypse; **3**—Travis Funk; **4**—Chris Blackheart; **5**—Iceburg; **6**—Dan Bidondi; **7**—God of Thunder; **8**—Robbie Ellis; **9**—Tony Omega; **10**—Tony Atlas.

NWA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN

1—CHRIS HARRIS
(1) 232, Fort Wright, KY
2—RAVEN
(6) 243, Short Hills, NJ
3—A.J. STYLES
(2) 202, Gainesville, GA
4—ABYSS
(3) 295, Cincinnati, OH
5—J.T. WOLFEN
(5) 297, New Haven, CT
6—RICKY MURDOCH
(4) 261, Houston, TX
7—D-LO BROWN
(-) 281, Chicago, IL
8—FRANKIE KAZARIAN
(-) 220, Yucca Valley, CA
9—JERELLE CLARK
(8) 190, Orlando, FL
10—ONYX
(9) 218, Jamaica City, NY

NWA-TNA

NWA Champion:
JEFF JARRETT
(C) 230, Nashville, TN

1—FRANKIE KAZARIAN
(8) 220, Yucca Valley, CA
2—CHRIS HARRIS
(2) 232, Fort Wright, KY
3—RAVEN
(6) 243, Short Hills, NJ
4—A.J. STYLES
(5) 202, Gainesville, GA
5—ABYSS
(3) 295, Cincinnati, OH
6—RED
(-) 147, Brooklyn, NY
7—RON KILLINGS
(4) 230, Charlotte, NC
8—JERRY LYNN
(9) 216, Minneapolis, MN
9—MICHAEL SHANE
(7) 221, San Antonio, TX
10—MONTY BROWN
(-) 268, Detroit, MI

JAPAN

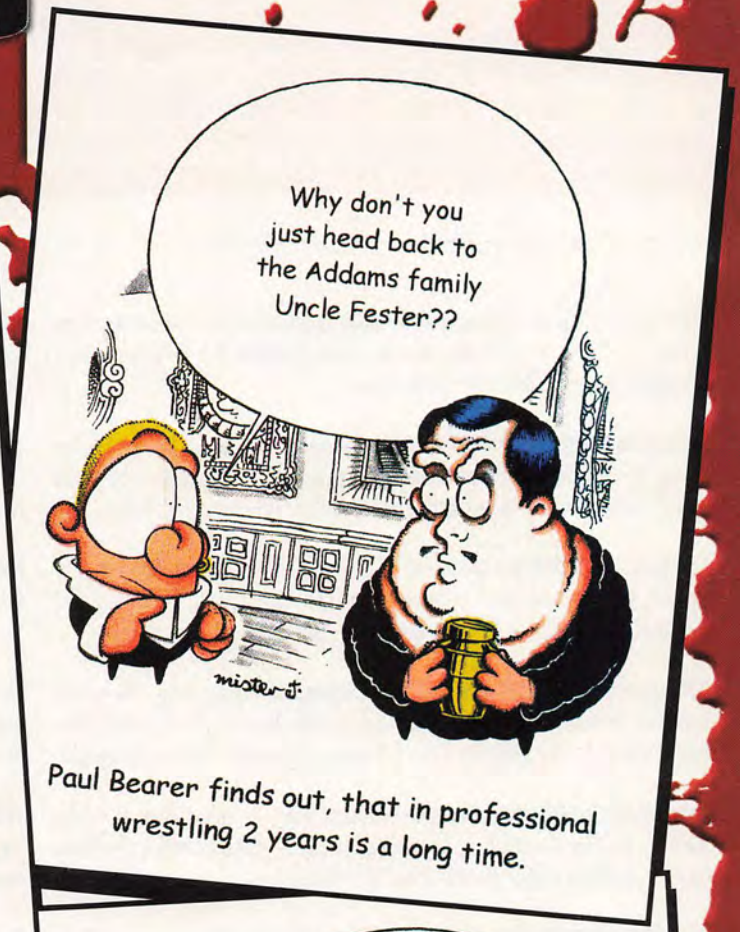
1—KENTA KOBASHI
(1) 282, Fukuchiyama, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion
2—TOSHIAKI KAWADA
(2) 245, Ashikaga, Japan
All-Japan Triple Crown champion
3—BOB SAPP
(-) 374, Seattle, WA
IWGP heavyweight champion
4—KENSUKE SASAKI
(3) 251, Tokyo, Japan
5—HIROYOSHI TENZAN
(9) 270, Tokyo, Japan
6—KEIJI MUTO
(8) 245, Yamanashi, Japan
7—JUSHIN LIGER
(-) 222, Hiroshima, Japan
8—SHINYA HASHIMOTO
(10) 287, Gifu, Japan
9—YUJI NAGATA
(4) 228, Tokyo, Japan
10—TIGER MASK IV
(-) 170, Uruyasu, Japan

MEXICO

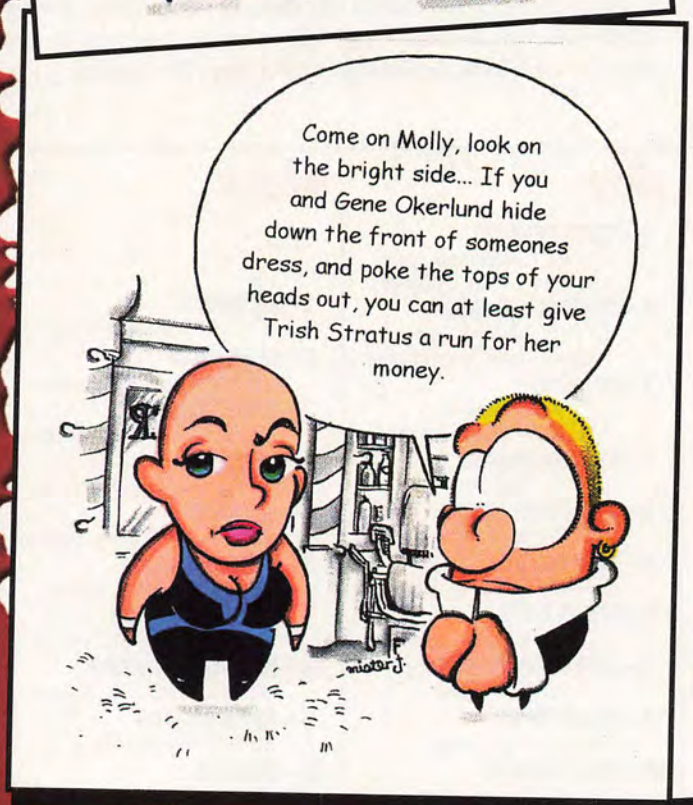
1—MR. NIEBLA
(1) 185, Cualtitlan, Mexico
2—LATIN LOVER
(5) 190, Monterrey, Mexico
3—EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(2) 180, Tulancingo, Mexico
4—L.A. PARK
(3) 235, Torreon, Mexico
5—SHOCKER
(8) 185, Guadalajara, Mexico
6—HECTOR GARZA
(4) 220, Monterrey, Mexico
7—ULTIMO GUERRERO
(-) 173, Mexico City, Mexico
8—JUVENTUD GUERRERA
(6) 165, Mexico City, Mexico
9—ABISMO NEGRO
(-) 210, Pachua, Mexico
10—VAMPIRO
(-) 220, Thunder Bay, Ontario

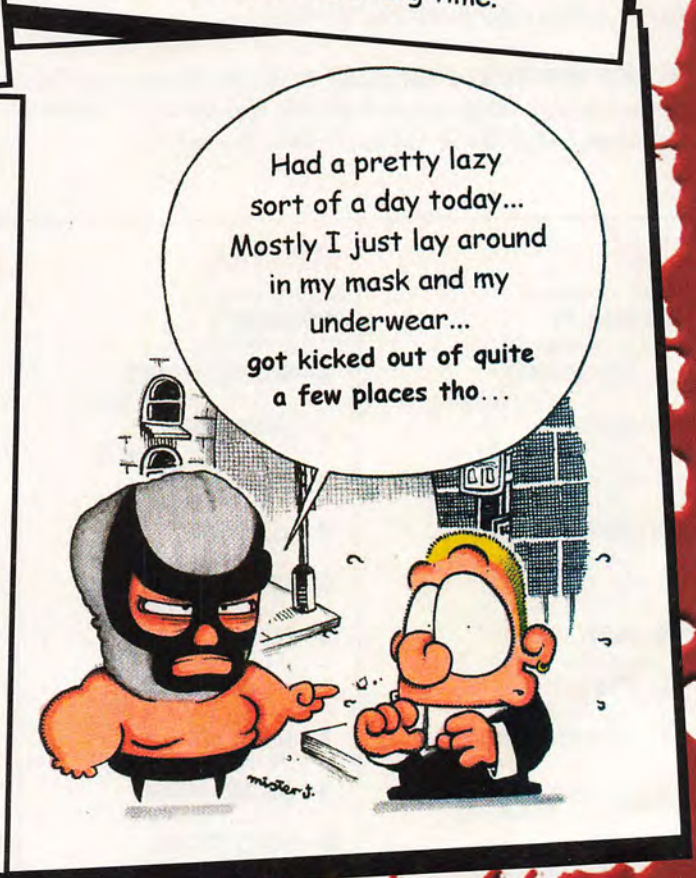
Drawing Blood

By Jason Conlan



Paul Bearer finds out, that in professional wrestling 2 years is a long time.





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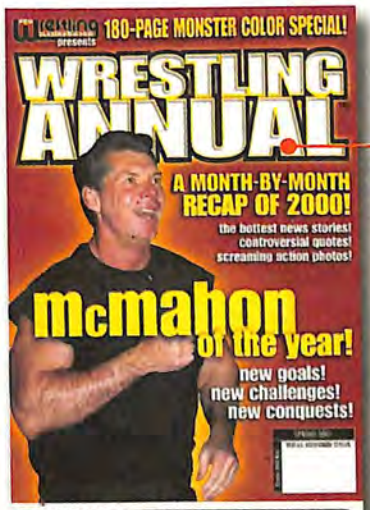

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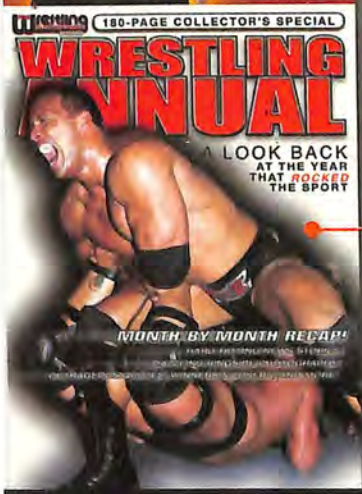

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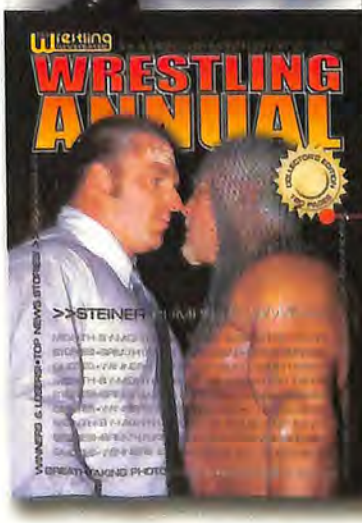

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